

GUIDELINES FOR CREATING  
A WISDOM STYLE OF MINISTRY

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## ABSTRACT

"Guidelines for Creating a Wisdom Style of Ministry" outlines Biblical and contemporary resources for enriching liberal Protestant Christian ministry in terms of the metaphorical, holistic mode of knowing associated with the sages of ancient Israel and the parable teachings of Jesus Christ. The wisdom mode is presented as not only psychologically pragmatic, but theologically essential for revitalization of the New Testament insights into Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the wisdom of God. These insights, which have been long neglected, are suggested as interfacing with insights of the dominant salvation history tradition to more effectively address the question of how potentially destructive human growth efforts can be harmonized with the overall beneficence and order of the natural world as created by God.

The incarnational reality of Jesus Christ, viewed from the perspective of the wisdom tradition, includes perceptions of feminine consciousness (Jung), the right brain (Ornstein), or the metaphoric mind (Watzlwick); and through it a unity of language, belief and life is brought about which makes comprehensible the participation of all humankind and the entire natural world itself, in the living image of God. It is in the wisdom tradition that the liberal Church can find hope and direction for its

contemporary global mission. It is also suggested that the undue Protestant emphasis on God as the Father (and Jesus as the Son) can be balanced with the reintroduction of the Biblical feminine personification of wisdom as Sophia and her mytho-logia.

## Chapter 1

### WISDOM AND CHRISTIAN MINISTRY TODAY

#### INTRODUCTION

Liberal Christianity today is facing a crisis of transition. The transition is from relative ignorance and innocence to knowledge and responsibility for our chaotic global situation. While many Christians are flocking to the security of conservative, evangelical churches with their "cozy" creedal formulas, membership in our liberal mainline churches is shrinking shockingly. Thus far, liberal Christianity has failed to address the world wide problems of world hunger, destruction of the eco-system and the threat of nuclear madness. For those Christians who are not convinced of the imminence of the second coming of Christ as the "solution" to all this, the challenge of global consciousness remains enormous, if not discouraging. However, there is a Biblical precedent for "actively awaiting" the restoration of world order through the promotion of increased human understanding, undertaken in creative submission to God's greater wisdom. It is in this tradition, the wisdom tradition, that the liberal church can find its hope and direction. The wisdom of Israel's sages and the parables of Jesus teach us that we need not fear ambiguity and unspeakably immense complexity, but that

we should confront, nurture, and indeed use them as instruments of revelation of the awesome mysteries of Divine wisdom.

I propose that the rich resources of the classical wisdom tradition and its "offspring" in the parables of Jesus provide a holistic approach to creation and God's power throughout all its forms. Such an approach is vital to the contemporary dilemma of the liberal church. The ancient wisdom resources set forth guidelines for symbolic and metaphorical creativity in a manner which is highly adaptable to the problem of addressing global issues within the limited forms of church life. Preaching, teaching and counseling alike will be seen as vehicles for a wisdom mode of metaphoric vision -- a vision which "encourages" seeing beyond our own inevitable prejudices and projected conceptualizations. The wisdom mode of approach educates persons simultaneously in the breadth and the depth of life's realities. Indeed, the global scene today is but a mirror of the complexity of the contemporary human psyche and its struggle to integrate a vast multitude of new awarenesses. The reflection of the face of humanity remains a sparkling jumble of fluid light as the waters of liberation continue to churn and flow afresh in the long stagnant pool of human relationships. To the degree that the church flees from the complexity of life today, the church will be unable to fulfill its global mission.

The Biblical tradition of the wisdom of the sages and, in a similar fashion, the parables of Jesus, speak the essentially ineffable truths of God's order and justice as they are found in the interplay of the human and natural world. They embrace the combination of values needed so badly in our church and our world: central valuation of individual life, and the nurturing of a pluralism of behavior and opinion within a framework of mutual dedication in community. Again, the human community is always set within the context of the natural world at large.

The guidelines for Christian ministry provided by wisdom's metaphorical vision have long been neglected in the face of the predominance of the Judaeo-Christian narrative tradition which 18th century Biblical theology determined as our "salvation history." This narrative tradition focuses on the "great acts" of God's intervention in the history of his chosen people -- the "life story" of the "nation" Israel. From the Christian perspective, the coming of Jesus the Christ is therein seen as the fulfillment of this linear historical drama as it is set forth in the Hebrew Bible. By contrast, recent Biblical scholarship has uncovered wisdom's approach to history as a mythic and poetic narrative style which essentially complements the so-called "salvation history" narrative tradition. It focuses less on the "time-line" (chronos) of Israel's history than on the "timeliness" (kairos) of cooperation



with the Divine throughout the natural and the human world. More will be said later about the distinctions between the two. However, it suffices to say now that there are two distinct Biblical modes of approach to our faith history, and that the wisdom mode has been sadly neglected in the current enterprise of Christian ministry. Recent attempts to employ behavioral data and abstract jargon from the behavioral sciences and technology have contributed to the alienation of ministry from its more poetical and metaphorical heritage. The time is ripe for the liberation of Christian ministry from an unduly narrow linear understanding of sacred history, dry rationalism, and exclusivistic, analytical language.

Wisdom teachers of old knew well that the total meaning of God's activity was greater than merely the sum of its parts. They understood ambiguity and obscurity to be vital to their indirect mode of communication as it embraced an appropriate sense of awe and reverence for the Creator. It will be seen in this paper that the wisdom "style" is characterized by the language of "controlled vagueness" which represents the dynamics of faith in the ineffable paradox of the particular.<sup>1</sup> This will be shown as foundational for the teachings of Jesus and uniquely

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 62.

mainfest in his life.

I will contend that the resources for wisdom are within each person's fantasy and dream world--each person's imagination, and that it is in this realm that one is most keenly attuned to wisdom's humble awareness that the purpose of human existence is not to create but to "imitate."<sup>2</sup> We can do no other good than to strive towards fulfillment of the image of God. Wisdom's God challenges us to "co-create" as we "imitate." That is to say, the wisdom enterprise is a search for metaphors and symbols which, at their best, leave a "space" -- an opening -- for the infusion of that life-power which brings meaning and fulfillment to all things in the unity of language, faith and life. I will contend that the wisdom tradition educates persons in a unique metaphorical, holistic mode of knowing, and as attested to by several of the New Testament authors, this wisdom understanding is necessary to fully embrace the mystery of the incarnational reality of Jesus Christ. The riches of the wisdom tradition interface with the riches of the salvation history tradition to address the question of the participation of all humankind and all the creation in the living image of God.

The following survey of wisdom's path through Biblical and contemporary resources is designed to be

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<sup>2</sup>The etymology of "image", from the Latin *imāgō*, is related to *imitari*: imitate.

introductory and practical. The guidelines set forth for creating a wisdom style of ministry merely point to areas for further pursuit by the wisdom seeker. Both Biblical scholarship and scientific research into the "metaphoric mind" continue to burgeon even at this writing. The wisdom seeker should not be discouraged or overwhelmed by the technical explanatory language, for it is used here for primarily polemical purposes. Once the nature and the worth of wisdom's riches are recognized, their pursuit must be undertaken simply as a matter of increased perception which is inherent to the depth and quality of everyday Christian life itself.

#### THE WAY OF WISDOM: METAPHOR AND PARABLE

For the purposes of this paper we will define metaphor as "the synthesis of several units of observation into one commanding image: it is the expression of a complex idea, not by analysis nor by direct statement, but by a sudden perception of an objective relation." This definition of Herbert Read's from his *English Prose Style* (1952)<sup>3</sup> stresses the mediating function of metaphorical language in a manner which is particularly appropriate to the complex relational dynamics of Christian living. To speak of a "sudden perception of an objective relation" is

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<sup>3</sup>Wheelwright, p. 94.

to deal with the dynamics of "revelation" and "conversion". The "way" of the metaphor, and the extended form of metaphor called the parable, is the way of unity of language, faith and life experience.<sup>4</sup> It will be seen that this is also the "way" of wisdom taught by Israel's sages and witnessed most fully in the unity of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, to create a wisdom style of ministry, is to pursue imitation of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

As we all know, Jesus' teachings are characterized by the use of parables. But how can we create parables which convey God's wisdom? The task is difficult. The qualitative gap between the average minister's homiletic example stories and the parables of Jesus is due less to a lack of aesthetic precision, than to a lack of integrity--of unity--between the individual's language, faith, and life practice. Effective Christian preaching, teaching, and counseling exists when we are not "told about" religious experience, but when we are invited to participate imaginatively in a living metaphor which encounters us as a new way of speaking, believing and living. If the language of faith is the language of metaphor, then it must not merely be attractive in its images, but commanding in its authenticity and synthetic quality. It is the striking

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<sup>4</sup>Sallie McFague TeSelle, Speaking in Parables (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 1.

unity of language, faith and life which lures persons to participate emotionally and imaginatively in the Christian truth.

Jesus, like the wisdom prophets and teachers before him, characteristically concerned himself with the dynamics of the simple life and the common good. By comparison with the salvation history narrative, Jesus' teachings may be seen to be inclusivistic and non-authoritarian. The parables of Jesus reflect the wisdom sages earthy, "democratic" and "progressive" qualities.

It is no coincidence that several New Testament authors placed Jesus along the wisdom path or trajectory. The Apostle Paul recognized the centrality of the wisdom of God in the life and death of Jesus Christ:

Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than that of humankind, and the weakness of God is stronger than that of humankind.

(I Corinthians 1:20-25, RSV,  
with non-sexist modifications)

The above statement by the Apostle Paul gives us an opportunity for a brief discursis on the nature of the extended metaphor called a parable, and its appropriateness for communicating the basic Christian belief that the power

and wisdom of God are manifest in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

A parable is an extended metaphor which is not translatable into concepts. It is open-ended. It lures us into its pregnant silence and its deep, dark "crack" opening into mystery.<sup>5</sup> Its form often contains a reversal in the plot and/or creates a reversal in our expectations. It catches us up with a surprise twist which upsets the "normal" order of things. How much more of a reversal--a surprise twist--could there be in the story of the salvation of a people than the establishment of power by their Messiah through crucifixion on a cross? How much more open-ended and full of pregnant silences "opening into mystery" could a story be, than the Marcan account of the gospel in which the tomb looms large and empty?

The scope of this paper only allows us to allude to the possibility of the future development of a "parable Christology" based on the form and structure of certain Gospel accounts. Our intention here is merely to point to the fact that the basic truth of the Gospel, and the task of "preaching Christ crucified", inherently lends itself to the extended metaphorical form known as parable. In view of the resurrection experience, the Cross of Jesus becomes the paradigm for the reversal of our ultimate

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

expectations about wisdom and foolishness and, indeed, life and death.

It is a phenomenon unique to the parable literary form that the story "interprets us". We cannot interpret it. Jesus phrased the situation thusly, "They who have ears, let them hear" (Matthew 13:13). It is this particular trait about parables which makes them such apt vehicles for the communicating and bestowing of Gods' grace. Christian parables give an invitation to life which the bearer is left free to accept or reject. Gods' grace is diffusely and opaquely in the "background" of the parable story. Familiar persons and events are presented in a new context which catches the hearer "unawares" and "jolts" them into new and transforming awarenesses. We are given a sudden view of things from their reverse, unnoticed side.

The subtleties of this dynamic are best observed through the study of Jesus' parables. John Dominic Crossan argues that Jesus' parables radically challenged his listeners to abandon secured values in order to "give God room to be God."<sup>6</sup> As TeSelle says, "Metaphorical language, parabolic language, does not take us out of everyday reality, but drives us more deeply into it, de-forming our usual apprehensions in such a way that we see that reality

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<sup>6</sup>John Dominic Crossan, In Parables (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 121.

in a new way."<sup>7</sup> Jesus used everyday language and situations in his parables. His everyday life and his lowly death were a parable--a living metaphor--of what he taught. The Cross drives believers more deeply "into" the everyday realities of suffering and death and thereby transforms them. Wisdom understanding entails "doing" as well as "saying," sacrifice as well as artistry. The resurrected Christ--the Wisdom of God--is with us today as we commit ourselves to the unite our language, faith and life.

The parables of Jesus confront persons with God's love, or the Kingdom of God if you wish to call it that, and move persons to decide to accept or reject it at the deepest levels of their being. Although there are those who are consciously ready to make a decision, it would seem that far more persons are ready or needing to accept God's love at an unconscious level. It is they who have "ears to hear" the message of the parables. It is they who are "jolted" into a new way of speaking believing and living by the subtle invitation of the parables. At different times in the course of person's lives different images move one more strongly. The parable of the Wedding Feast may grasp us one day, and the next day we may be grasped by a parable about a wayward son, migrant workers, doctors and patients, or widows on limited incomes. Of course, as Christians

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<sup>7</sup>TeSelle, p. 70.



re-encounter parables over and over again similar processes of renewed awareness and regeneration occur. These processes can be facilitated by consciously opening oneself to "be interpreted" by the parables. For ministers who have a certain amount of critical training, a study of the parables of Jesus for the purpose of creating a wisdom style of ministry must include, but move beyond, traditional historical critical questions about the parables.

The following study of the parable of the Wedding Feast is adapted from the analysis of TeSelle.<sup>8</sup> Her central thesis of the importance of the parable to theology is similar to my thesis of the importance of the way of wisdom--parable and metaphor--for Christian ministry. Therefore her approach to the parable is fitting.

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying "The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son," and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying "Tell those who are invited, Behold I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast." But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully and killed them. The king was angry and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants. "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find. And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Matt. 22:1-10 of Luke 14:16-24 (RSV)

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.,

The Biblical parable must be read several times since the contemporary reader lacks the familiarity with and immediacy of the basic setting and characters which the "original" hearer would have had. The relations of those involved in the action, and the subtle "background" dynamics of the story must be given a chance to penetrate us.

The "units of observation" which are synthesized into one commanding image are to be found in the main "characters" and the structure of the parable. The king, a very important person (if not the important person in the land), the people on the king's initial guest list (high society folk, no doubt), and the "street people" who were "found" represent the central "types" of characters. Between the three types one can assume a great deal of contrast. However, it is the shocking contrast between the "delights of the feast" offered by the generous and patient king and the violently destructive response of the one unappreciative group of guests, which gives us our first indication that something out of the ordinary is going on. The king's anger is rather "reasonable" in conventional "eye for an eye" morality. But, as TeSelle notes, there is a second movement--a reversal--in the story when the king issues a seemingly indiscriminate invitation to the people in the streets, good and bad alike. The invitation to the second group is a "total" as was the liquidation of the first group. At this point the reader/hearer is stirred to

contemplate the king's logic for this second line of behavior. Obviously the logic of merit is not being employed.

The "new" logic of the parable is that those who are invited to the feast are those who will accept the invitation... the logic of God's grace. But it should be stressed that the logic is not an otherworldly or religious logic. It is important that the logic of parables remains secular, and mundane as a metaphorical "linguistic incarnation" to use a term coined by Gerhard Ebeling.<sup>9</sup> The complex idea indirectly presented in the background of the parable of the Wedding Feast is that in the realm of divine and human order one's casual refusal to accept a gracious invitation apparently has something to do with whether one lives or dies. To state this complex idea directly would eliminate any imaginative participation in its reality. To conclude this brief foray into the parable of the Wedding Feast, I would like to quote from Te Selle, who summarizes the matter concisely:

Thus in the Parable of the Wedding Feast we are at no point "taken out" of the story into a "religious" world; the shock or new insight of the parable is in being brought to see that everyday situation--the wedding feast and its guest list--in a new way; invitation not by merit but by a gracious lack of concern about merit. One invitation by grace is brought to light, glimpsed, pointed to by means of cracks in the realism of the story--exaggeration, hyperbole, dislocations... The

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<sup>9</sup>Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 193-196.

whole movement of the story is not only kept within its own confines at every point but returns the reader who would participate fully in it and illuminated by it again and again to the story itself."<sup>10</sup>

While TeSelle ventures no further into the actual psychological processes which take place when the reader of a parable is "jolted" or "shocked" into new insights, several other literary critical scholars have taken on the task. The most notable endeavor has been undertaken on the part of structuralist exegete Dan O. Via who has postulated that the parable is a medium which represents metaphorically the complex psychic phenomenon known in Jungian psychology as the Self or personality.<sup>11</sup> Like many efforts which span two disciplines, Via's work is not convincing at a technical level, but it offers significant food for thought for an enterprise such as our own.

Via attempts to bridge the aesthetic and existential categories which so often haunt the pastoral counselor. The workings of the unconscious mind and human imagination are obviously brought into play in the hearing of myths, fairy tales, and parables alike, but the story that "works" as a vehicle for Gods' grace contains a parable that "gets it all together" for the hearer: the estrangement between God and human is experienced as overcome. The workings of

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<sup>10</sup>TeSelle, pp. 77-78.

<sup>11</sup>Dan Otto Via, Jr., "The Parable of the Unjust Judge: A Metaphor for the Unrealized Self" in Daniel Patie (ed.) Semiology and Parables (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1976), p. 1-70.

the unconscious mind and human imagination are brought into play in a fashion similar to that of the "dream work" explored by classical psychoanalysis. Indeed, many people would testify that their dreams have become life changing "parables" for them. What does this mean for the development of a wisdom style of ministry? The implications for pastoral counseling will be dealt with in the last chapter of this paper, but it suffices to say here that our night dreams and unfettered day-dreaming (imagination) can be the source of significant metaphorical material for the construction of contemporary parables. Dreams interpret the dreamer in a similar fashion as do parables. Journal keeping, such as outlined in Ira Progoff's Intensive Journal workshop,<sup>12</sup> does much to nurture understanding of the metaphorical creativity of one's unconscious mind. Do parables, like dreams, reflect the dynamic process by which the center of consciousness (the ego) moves towards realization of that which Jung calls the Self?<sup>13</sup>

In its beginnings, wisdom consisted in knowing that at the bottom of things an order is at work, silently and often in a scarcely noticeable way, making for a "balance"

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<sup>12</sup>Ira Progoff, At a Journal Workshop: Intensive Journal (New York: Dialogue House, 1975).

<sup>13</sup>The Self is an archetype (a foundational psychic structure which is ultimately indescribable and unknowable) of wholeness or totality which cannot empirically be distinguished from the image of God.

of events. It is shown as something for which one must wait, and be capable of seeing, when it shows itself.<sup>14</sup> Wisdom has always been, and will always be found in those forms of expression which indirectly point to the sacred as a "here and now" quality of God's acceptable time. It has to do with the kairos "background" of God's activity in sacred history rather than the chronos "foreground." It is characteristic that these hidden "clues" of God are presented in metaphorical form. The traditional Jungian understanding of the Self echoes many of these traits. It is seen to embrace all opposites and all components of the individual personality (conscious and unconscious). It exceeds the consciousness of the individual by an indeterminate extent because it is the process of becoming what one always was, as well as all that one can possibly be. It is the source of life which is there from the beginning and which confronts the individual independently of his or her conscious will. It would appear that metaphors and parables function to reveal and to evoke participation in the universal archetypes which comprise the wisdom of the human psyche, and that the wisdom of God is, in Jungian terms, the wisdom of the Self.

I suggest that guidelines for creating a wisdom style of ministry are to be found not only in the Bible but

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<sup>14</sup>Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), I, 428.

in those schools of thought which both address and flow from the metaphorical unity of language, belief, and life. Contemporary literature and clinical analysis based on the "classical" work of Jung provide a central resource for the pastoral counselor. Recent cognitive behavior research related to the split-brain theory provides a complementary set of resources for understanding the function of the right-brain or the "metaphoric mind". These resources, in addition to other complementary schools of thought, will be briefly outlined in the last chapter of this paper. However, it will be seen that the "religious" use of metaphor and parable lends itself foremost to the simple intuitions of Christian storytellers, poets, and counselors. It is an "art" of the layperson as much as it is an "art" of the professional ministry.

Ideally, today's wisdom-seeker needs only to surround her or himself with Biblical and contemporary metaphors and parables. But for today's ministers who struggle to keep their sermons and teachings "fresh" with local and world events, the wisdom search also means taking a difficult turn inward for personal journal keeping and dreamwork. It means a difficult turn away from the grinding pace of parish work for a daily retreat into "re-creational" reading of fables, fairytales, parables, and poetry. Due to the cultural neglect and/or repression of the metaphoric mind--the right brain in terms of

cognitive theory or, if you wish, feminine consciousness in Jungian terms--he or she must also seek intentional psychological growth through one of the "metaphorical" schools of therapy or counseling. Therefore, I propose that it is not enough for the average minister merely to turn to the Biblical wisdom resources for devotional study. It should be remembered, however, that such a study is vital for the realization of wisdom's deepest truth as incarnated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ben Sirach 39:1-11 describes the virtues of wisdom's scholar as follows:

It is otherwise with the man who devotes his soul  
to reflecting on the Law of the Most High.  
He researches into the wisdom of all the Ancients,  
he occupies his time with the prophecies.  
He preserves the discourses of famous men,  
he is at home with the niceties of parables.  
He researches into the hidden sense of proverbs,  
he ponders the obscurities of parables.  
He enters the service of princes,  
he is seen in the presence of rulers.  
He travels in foreign countries,  
he has experienced human good and human evil,  
At dawn and with all his heart,  
he resorts to the Lord who made him;  
he pleads in the presence of the Most High,  
he opens his mouth in prayer  
and makes entreaty for his sins.  
If it is the will of the great Lord,  
he will be filled with the spirit of understanding,  
he will shower forth words of wisdom,  
and in prayer give thanks to the Lord,  
He will grow upright in purpose and learning,  
he will ponder the Lord's hidden mysteries.  
He will display the instruction he has received,  
Taking his pride in the Law of the Lord's covenant.



## Chapter 2

## WISDOM RESOURCES IN THE BIBLE

Recent Biblical scholarship has discovered the presence of wisdom material scattered throughout the Bible. Previously it was seen to be "confined" primarily to the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament and Ben Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha. Wisdom is now recognized to have been a significant part of the environment or gestalt surrounding the more dominant sacred history tradition of Israel. In the exchange between Hellenistic philosophy and Judaism, the roots of wisdom were neglected. Later confusion of wisdom with Hellenistic gnostic concepts resulted in "the baby being thrown out with the bath water" during the struggle against gnostic heresy in the Early Church. To explore the nature of wisdom as it has come to us down through the ages we must begin with the relationship between wisdom and sacred history. Within this context wisdom will be seen to involve a general perspective on life, a specific literary tradition, a female personification, and a style of teaching and counsel.

It is widely accepted that the emphasis of the Hebraic salvation-history narrative is on the forward-moving initiative, the transcendent demand, the call, the restless

sojourning--of Yahweh. Early historians of the faith sought to record anecdotal accounts of God's activity in unique political and cultic encounters with the "chosen" people. However, Gerhard Von Rad tells us that, "Israel, as she tried to find her way in such large historical areas, also found herself increasingly faced with a new question, namely, the question about the constant factor in history, that is, the question whether the confusion caused by the unique event is not after all only apparent, whether recurring features are not also discernable."<sup>1</sup> With the Wisdom "movement" Israel's historians began to seek accounts of the more mundane (yet equally mysterious) incarnations of God's revelation. Israel sought the wisdom of God incarnate both in the natural world and in the "hearts" of individual persons. These sages drew from the pool of Near Eastern wisdom in terms of generalized, secular patterns of human response. In keeping with their concern for their special Covenant relationship, the sages dealt with issues of social responsibility and justice in terms of subtle interactions between general rules and their application to concrete moments of decision.

The sages often told colorful stories and parables. While remaining "loyal" to Yahweh they captured the color and the vitality of the gods of myth by using consistent

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 290.

patterns of metaphorical language, and "mytho-logy."<sup>2</sup> In the process of discovery and eventual personification of wisdom, the sages gained a fairly sophisticated theological tool for dealing with the intricate complexities of the relationships between language, belief and life. Mack tells us that, "The figure of wisdom becomes the language expression for a category of 'knowledge' which does not belong to man as man on the basis of observation and human experience, but which may now be understood as God's wisdom, a wisdom which stands over against man and confronts him with itself."<sup>3</sup>

The wisdom tradition did not directly address the foundational events of the Covenant community as did the salvation-history tradition. However, we must realize that wisdom's historical perspective was nevertheless essential to the development and preservation of the faith of the post-Exilic Jews for whom the "shape" of sacred history had radically changed. Mack asserts:

The new insight has to do with the limitations of the possibilities of the human understanding of God--hence wisdom was objectified, personified, and distanced from man by portraying it as a mythic person whom man must now seek, but who is difficult to find in this world.

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<sup>2</sup>Burton Mack, "Wisdom Myth and Mytho-logy," Interpretation, XXIV:1 (1970), 46-60, Mack cites an important distinction between myth and the employment of myth for theological reflection. The latter method was that of the wisdom sages and it required the use of mythic language derived through what Mack calls "mytho-logy."

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

The new affirmation had to do with what must be called faith in the continuing wisdom of Yahweh as Lord of creation and redemption--hence wisdom is affirmed by portraying it as a mythic person belonging to Yahweh and speaking from him to men in the world.<sup>4</sup>

This perspective is better understood by exploration into Proverbs 1-9 and the three primary dimensions of wisdom's faith set forth therein. Norman Habel in his study on the symbolism of wisdom delineates them as follows:<sup>5</sup>

1. The individual and experiential field of "old" international wisdom (Proverbs 4-6).
2. The religious and communal field of Israelite covenant context (Proverbs 1-3 and 7-9).
3. The primordial and cosmic field of theological reflection upon tradition (Proverbs 3:13-20 and 7-9).

One may summarize these dimensions of faith as having to do with humanity at large, the community of faith, and the cosmos. It needs to be pointed out that even within the dimension of the community of faith, wisdom's insights overlap little with those of the salvation history narrative tradition. Wisdom's observations are far more "universal" and at the same time "individual". This is due primarily to wisdom's use of metaphorical language as it unites language, belief and life practice. We see these three qualities in the following speech by Wisdom in Proverbs 4:20-27:

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>5</sup>Norman Habel, "The Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," Interpretation, XXV: 2 (1972), 134.

My son, be attentive to my words: (language)  
     incline your ear to my sayings.  
 Let them not escape from your sight:  
     keep them within your heart. (faith)  
 For they are life to him who finds them,  
     and healing to all his flesh. (life)  
 Keep your heart with all vigilance;  
     for from it flow the springs of life. (faith)  
 Put away from you crooked speech,  
     and put devious talk far from you. (language)  
 Let your eyes look directly forward,  
     and your gaze be straight before you.  
 Take heed to the path of your feet,  
     then all your ways will be sure. (life)  
 Do not swerve to the right or to the left;  
     turn your foot away from evil.

Wisdom's words paint a vivid image of the path of life--the way of Wisdom--as an open road on which one must nimbly navigate oneself with diligence and purposeful seeking of harmony and integration within one's self. "The wise man has an inner compass for the journey of life: the better he knows his own heart the more he will enjoy traveling the way," notes Habel.<sup>6</sup> The image of the extreme opposite type of person is described in Proverbs 6:12-15:

A worthless person, a wicked man,  
     goes about with crooked speech,  
 winks with his eyes, scrapes with his feet,  
     points with his finger,  
 with perverted heart devises evil,  
     continually sowing discord;  
 therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly;  
     in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.

Our imagination fluctuates between the two extreme images of persons in the process of seeking to find our own "place" on the path of wisdom. The metaphors of the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

individual and experiential field of wisdom are vivid indeed.

In the second dimension of faith, within the religious and communal covenant framework, we see that wisdom concerns itself primarily with issues of righteousness, justice and equity. It is especially concerned with the young and the "simple."

That men may know wisdom and instruction,  
     understanding words of insight,  
 receive instruction in wise dealing,  
     righteousness, justice, and equity;  
 that prudence may be given to the simple,  
     knowledge and discretion to the youth--  
 the wise man also may hear and increase in learning,  
     and the man of understanding acquire skill,  
 to understand a proverb and a figure,  
     the words of the wise and their riddles.  
 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;  
     fools despise wisdom and instruction.

(Proverbs 1:2-7)

The conjunction of instrumental value and intrinsic religious value is vital for wisdom.

It is fitting that the religious field of wisdom is metaphorically portrayed as a street preacher. She meets us at the crossroads of our everyday travels. In Proverbs 1:22-33 she invites us to live and live well. We are told that if we fail to take her invitation seriously we will suffer anxiety and self-annihilation through our own complacency.

Wisdom cries aloud in the street;  
     in the markets she raises her voice;  
 on the top of the walls she cries out;  
     at the entrance of the city gates she speaks;

"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?  
 How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing?  
 And fools hate knowledge?  
 Give heed to my reproof...  
 For the simple are killed by their turning away,  
 and the complacency of fools destroys them;  
 but he who listens to me will dwell secure  
 and will be at ease, without dread of evil."

(Proverbs 1:22-23)

Moral evil is generally attributed by wisdom to prideful assertion of human free will and the passions to which humans have made themselves slaves. Hence we find frequent exhortations about the communal activities of good parenting (cf. Sirach 17:18-36, 30, 42:9-14), marital faithfulness (cf. Sirach 26), and sexual indulgence (cf. Sirach 18:30-33), in addition to those against idleness and complacency (cf. Proverbs 15:19, 18:9). While wisdom is personified and as such, we can call her "Sophia," it should be made clear that she is not of the same "nature" as various pagan goddesses of her time. Her devotion to the interests of persons as well as her representation of God's long-standing call for redemption, places her in a uniquely mediating role between God and persons. (It has remained an issue of some debate as to the exact nature of her representation and her nature vis a vis God.)

The third dimension of faith involving primordial and cosmic reflection is well illustrated in Proverbs 8:1-36. Here Sophia speaks again as a "preacher." However, she identifies herself as a primordial attribute to God:

"The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,/the first of his acts of old./ages ago I was set up./at the first, before the beginning of the earth..." How wonderfully the connection is made once again, between language, life, and faith. The beauty of the metaphorical language describing the spectacle of the cosmos and its order can scarcely be surpassed:

Happy is the man who finds wisdom,  
 and the man who gets understanding,  
 for the gain from it is better than gain from silver  
 and its profit better than gold.  
 She is more precious than jewels.  
 and nothing you desire can compare with her.  
 Long life is in her right hand;  
 in her left hand are riches and honor.  
 Her ways are ways of pleasantness,  
 and all her paths are peace.  
 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;  
 those who hold her fast are called happy.  
 The Lord by Wisdom founded the earth;  
 by understanding he established the heavens;  
 by his knowledge the deeps broke forth,  
 and the clouds drop down the dew.

(Proverbs 3:13-20)

Having briefly circumscribed the three primary dimensions or fields of wisdom's faith, it is time to see how they are embraced in the personification of wisdom known as Sophia. She is a female entity of great beauty and integrity who provides men and women alike with a quite "liberated" model of metaphorical creativity. In the form of a hymn sung by Sophia herself, Sirach 24 tells us much about Sophia in the first person. It tells us that she came from the mouth of God after wandering the highest heavens. She elected Israel as her resting place, and



ministered in the holy "tent" of Zion. In beautiful mytho-poetic language she compares herself to a number of trees and fragrant plants as follows:

I have struck root among the glorious people,  
     in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.  
 Like a cedar on Lebanon I am raised aloft,  
     like a cypress on Mount Hermon,  
 Like a palm tree in Engedi,  
     like a rosebush in Jerico,  
 Like a fair olive tree in the field,  
     like a plane tree growing beside water.  
 Like cinnamon, or fragrant balm, or precious myrrh,  
     I give forth perfume;  
 Like galbanum and onycha and sweet spices,  
     like the odor of incense in the holy place.  
 I spread out my branches like a terebinth,  
     my branches so bright and so graceful.  
 I bud forth delights like the vine,  
     my blossoms become fruit fair and rich.  
 Come to me, all you that yearn for me,  
     and be filled with my fruits;  
 You will remember me as sweeter than honey,  
     better to have than the honeycomb.

(Sirach 24:12-19)

As the hymn continues we see Sophia as a hostess who serves drink as well as sweet food. She identifies herself with the law of Moses and with the wisdom flowing from it like the rivers and the sea. Her teachings shine like the dawn.

The spirit of wisdom is described in Wisdom of Solomon 7:21-25 (NAB):

For in her is a spirit  
     intelligent, holy, unique,  
 Manifold, subtle, agile,  
     clear, unstained, certain,  
 Not baneful, loving the good, keen,  
     unhampered, beneficent, kingly,  
 Firm, secure, tranquil,  
     all-powerful, all-seeing,  
 And pervading all spirits,  
     though they be intelligent, pure and very subtle.

For Wisdom is mobile beyond all motion,  
 and she penetrates and pervades all things by reason  
 of her purity.  
 For she is an aura of the might of God  
 and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty:  
 therefore nought that is sullied enters into her.

For all her primordial and cosmic dimensions, it is  
 important to recognize that one has not truly "met" Sophia  
 until one has heard her command for "thinking small".

Go to the ant, O sluggard,  
 study her ways, and learn wisdom

(Proverbs 6:6--NAB)

Having loosely circumscribed the spirit of wisdom  
 and its place in the matrix of Israelite faith and sacred  
 history, we can now approach the wisdom tradition as a  
 trajectory<sup>8</sup> bearing four primary trends: 1) a particular  
 perspective on life, 2) a number of characteristic literary  
 styles, 3) conceptualization of wisdom as an entity and, 4)  
 a distinctive style of counseling and teaching. These  
 trends should be remembered as fluid and open, always  
 admitting to inadequacy, and always pointing beyond  
 themselves to the mystery of God. From the Christian  
 perspective, I see them as pointing to the ultimate mystery  
 of God incarnate in the teachings and death and resurrection  
 of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> A "trajectory" is here taken to represent a dynamic  
 process or movement of intricate complexity.

## WISDOM AS A PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE

The general perspective on life demonstrated in the wisdom trajectory is that of concern for the connecting link between God and Creation. It presupposes that there is a meaning and order in things and events after which one must quest (however hidden they might be). Although the realm of wisdom is the realm of "mediation" of an invisible meaning and order, the oldest Hebrew expressions of wisdom were quite mundane and anthropocentric. They could almost be categorized simply as products of "common sense" derived from experience: family life, the marketplace, labor and leisure. In their emphasis, the sages shared much of this early wisdom with the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Egyptians. They drew examples from all walks of life and structured them in loose associations of terse and pithy expressions. Therefore, the great variety of experiences were not reduced to a general principle of order, but preserved in their multiplicity. An early example of this style is found in Proverbs 26:27 (RSV):

He who digs a pit (for another) will fall into it,  
and a stone will come back upon him who sets  
it rolling.

This saying reflects one of the major concerns of early wisdom, namely the question of human suffering.

In its later developments the Hebrew tradition moved beyond questions of order to questions relating to

the meaning of life. The book of Job represents this later quest and its accompanying sophistication of theological content. In Job 28 the inaccessibility of wisdom's meaning is stated radically in cosmic-spatial terms.<sup>9</sup> Man knows nothing equal to it, nor is it to be had in the land of the living... God knows the way to it: it is he who is familiar with its place." (Job 28:13, 23--NAB). In reference to the wisdom tradition Von Rad says, "Indeed in an odd inversion of its origin, it increasingly became the form par excellence in which all Israel's later theological thought moved."<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the cosmic expansion of their thought, the wisdom sages persistently emphasized the incarnational reality of wisdom within basic life experience. They focused on human receptivity to and intimacy with God, both in terms of the covenant community and the natural world. Wisdom expressed a personal sense of call or vocation which was particularly manifest in the personification of Wisdom. The purpose of wisdom was to produce "friends of God and prophets" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:27). The beginning of wisdom was seen to rest in trust, and openness to God based on a sense of awe and reverence which the sages called "walking in fear of the Lord." Wisdom's emphasis on the imminence

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<sup>9</sup>Mack, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Rad, p. 452.

of God waxed and waned in the face of the changing circumstances of Israel's "saving history." The book of Ecclesiastes is a representation of wisdom's emphasis taken to the extreme. Its cyclical approach "rings" hollow, due to its consequent alienation from the events of saving history. Von Rad attributes this to skepticism resulting from the wisdom tradition's legitimization of the divine call solely from creation (rather than from saving history). Therein Von Rad reaffirms the interdependence of the two traditions for the maintenance of the vitality of each.<sup>11</sup>

It may generally be said that, with the exception of the book of Ecclesiastes, the breadth of the wisdom trajectory was continually widened theologically, even to the point of including the apocalyptic perspective (see Daniel's vision in 2:31 ff.). The trend was towards self-reflection, self-criticism, and intellectual creativity in a struggle to steer the "successful" course through the mysteries of life and death. Any hope for the future--any presence of Wisdom "out there," before and beyond all things--was always focused on its relevance for the present and its tasks of daily living. Because of this, wisdom's perspective on life--its philosophy and theology--was perceived for many years as subservient and alien to the more sweeping salvation history tradition. However,

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 452.

wisdom's perspective on life arose in the face great threat of chaos which was perceived by the Israelites as they were buffeted around by the winds of foreign conquest and dispersion. It was a systematic practical endeavor to respond to perceived upheavals in both cosmic, political and social realms. James Crenshaw proposes that wisdom's "creation theology" is not only the framework, but the center of the Israelites saving history. For the sages, creation functions primarily as a defense of divine justice, according to Crenshaw, and consequently, "the centrality of the question of God's integrity in Israelite literature places creation theology at the center of the theological enterprise."<sup>12</sup>

In summary, it can be said that the perspective on life forwarded by the wisdom tradition is generally optimistic about the beneficence of God and his justice in the created order of things, invisible though it may be.

#### WISDOM AS A LITERARY TRADITION

The study of wisdom literature has recently been undergoing a major resurgence. James Crenshaw uses appropriately vivid imagistic language to describe its recent "ascent:"

In 'a sense wisdom literature can be labeled an orphan in the biblical household. Virtually ignored as an

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<sup>12</sup>James Crenshaw, Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom (New York: KTAV, 1976), p. 27.

entity until the beginning of this century, "Wisdom" suffered the indignity of judgment by alien standards and the embarrassment of physical similarities to non-Israelite parents... Orphans, however, have a champion whose intentions none can frustrate. Perhaps it was inevitable then, that this special orphan would become queen for a day, possibly even Queen Mother.<sup>13</sup>

The term "wisdom literature" was once used in the early church (see Eusebius 4, 22.9) to refer solely to the poetic book of Proverbs. Later literary critics broadened the category to include the poem of Job, the poetry-prose of Ecclesiastes, and the Apocryphal books of Ben Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon as well. However it is generally recognized today throughout the Apocrypha, the Hebrew Scriptures, and the New Testament one finds scattered sayings, oracles, aphorisms, fables, observations of animals and plants, poetry, proverbs, hymns, dialogues, disputes, parables, allegories, riddles, taunt songs and admonitions all of which represent a "literary precipitate emerging from the gathered wisdom of many generations."<sup>14</sup> According to Crenshaw, the influence of the wisdom tradition can be found as far afield as Genesis 1-11, 37, 39-50; Exodus 34; Deuteronomy; II Samuel 9-20; I Kings 1-2; Amos, Habakkuk, Isaiah, and Jonah.<sup>15</sup> In the books of Psalms and Lamentations, wisdom's affinity with poetic and hymnic

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>14</sup>James Wood, Wisdom Literature (London: Duckworth, 1967), p. 42.

<sup>15</sup>Crenshaw, p. 481.

forms makes it difficult to discern, but Elmer Leslie has identified Psalms 39, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133 and 144:12-15 as being of wisdom "temper" because of their characteristically "Wisdom" approach to the topic of justice and suffering.<sup>16</sup>

There is still much debate over the relationship of the classical prophets and the wisdom tradition, but both their content and form are increasingly being viewed as overlapping. As we have already stressed, imagistic and metaphorical language represents a major wisdom literary style. Many of these traits and particularly the extended metaphors called parables are found among the works of the prophets. Isaiah contains several parabolic speeches:

1:2-3 The Parable of the Ox and Ass  
 5:1-7 The Parable of the Vineyard (& 27:1-5, 7)  
 28:23-29 The Parable of the Farmer

In his introductory book on the Old Testament, B. Davie Napier places the Parable of the Vineyard in a central position in regard to the entire history of the Hebrews.<sup>17</sup> Taking his cue in this regard it seems appropriate that we consider it here at some length. It represents an excellent example of the extent of wisdom's influence, and some of the "growing edges" of the scholarly pursuit of

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<sup>16</sup>Elmer Leslie, Poetry and Wisdom (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), pp. 31-68.

<sup>17</sup>B. Davie Napier, Song of the Vineyard (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. xi-xii.



wisdom. Adjacent to the text are Napier's Hebrew notes which show a dramatically intensifying play on words.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that Isaiah 27 represents an apocalyptic addendum given by the author of "Fourth" Isaiah to the rather devastating conclusion given by the author of "first" Isaiah 5.

Let me sing for my beloved  
 a love song concerning his vineyard;  
 My beloved had a vineyard  
 on a very fertile hill.  
 He digged it and cleared it of stones;  
 and planted it with choice vines;  
 he built a watchtower in the midst of it,  
 and hewed out a wine vat in it;  
 and he looked for it to yield grapes,  
 but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem  
 and men of Judah,  
 judge, I pray you, between me  
 and my vineyard.  
 What more was there to do for my vineyard,  
 that I had not done in it?  
 When I looked for it to yield grapes,  
 why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you  
 what I will do to my vineyard.  
 I will remove its hedge,  
 and it shall be devoured;  
 I will break down its wall,  
 and it shall be trampled down.  
 I will make it a waste;  
 it shall not be pruned or hoed,  
 and briars and thorns shall grow up;  
 I will command the clouds  
 that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts  
 is the house of Israel,  
 and the men of Judah  
 are his pleasant planting;

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

and he looked for justice (mishpat)  
 but behold bloodshed; (mishpah)  
 for righteousness, (sedaquah)  
 but behold, a cry! (seaqah)

Isaiah 5:1-7

In that day:  
 "A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!  
 I, the Lord, am its keeper;  
 every moment I water it.  
 Lest anyone harm it,  
 I guard it night and day;  
 I have no wrath.  
 Would that I had thorns and briers to battle!  
 I would set out against them,  
 I would burn them up together.  
 .....  
 In days to come Jacob shall take root,  
 Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots,  
 and fill the whole world with fruit.

Isaiah 27:1-5, 7

The historical perspective of the wisdom tradition is seen very clearly here. The great deeds of a God and his people are communicated through a very mundane and practical medium. The song is one of intimate love and the disappointment of God at the demoralization of his law is particularly poignant. The play on words between justice (mishpat) and bloodshed (mishpah); righteousness (sedaquah) and cry (seaqah) typifies the care taken with words by wisdom's teachers.

William Wedbee also asserts that there are a number of proverbial speeches (10:15 and 29:15-16) and didactic forms in Isaiah which, in typically wisdom style, are more allusive than direct.<sup>19</sup> Like much of the wisdom material

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<sup>19</sup> William Wedbee, Isaiah and Wisdom (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 42.

they stretch the mind of the reader to consider actions in "reverse" of the way they normally consider them.

Woe to those who hide deep from the Lord their  
counsel, whose deeds are in the dark  
and who say. "Who sees us? Who knows us?"

You turn things upside down! Shall the potter  
be regarded as the clay;  
that the thing made should say of its maker,  
"He did not make me"; or the thing formed say  
of him who formed it,  
"He has no understanding"?

(Isaiah 29:15-16)

The "global" perspective of wisdom is reflected in  
Isaiah 14:26, in typically Wisdom style "bicolon" form.

This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the  
whole earth; and this is the hand that is  
stretched out over all the nations.

(Isaiah 14:26)

Much of the wisdom literature involves an explicit  
or implicit binary or bicolon composition. Not unlike  
Jesus' parables, the Israelite wisdom forms often evoke two  
"separate" movements of perception, which broaden the  
reader's spectrum of awareness. The parables and similes  
are therefore intensified in their power. Note the power-  
fully moving and mysterious way divine intervention is  
portrayed in Isaiah 17:12-14:

Ah, the thunder of many peoples, they thunder  
like the thundering of the sea!  
Ah, the roar of nations, they roar like the  
roaring of mighty waters!  
The nations roar like the roaring of many waters,  
but he will rebuke them, and they will flee  
far away, chased like chaff on the mountains  
before the wind and whirling dust before  
the storm.

At evening time, behold, terror!  
 Before morning, they are no more!  
 This is the portion of those who despoil us,  
 and the lot of those who plunder us.

It is interesting to note that Von Rad speaks of an early Jerusalem tradition with which Isaiah is clearly connected. This tradition, as reflected in the above text, is allied with the so-called "Songs of Zion" tradition. It refers to an event which has no ascertainable place in the history of Davidic Jerusalem, but neither, says Von Rad, is its material exactly mythological in the narrower sense of the term.<sup>20</sup> The account of the struggle against chaos would appear to be a pre-Davidic "root" of the wisdom tradition; Von Rad clarifies:

Oddly enough, the nations here spoken of are not historically determinable; they appear rather as a formless, surging mass completely without political configuration, an idea which was made necessary by the inclusion of motifs from the myth of the struggle with the chaos dragon. Neither is their defeat a military one; it is achieved by a miracle, and takes place unobserved between nightfall and dawn. Only when day breaks can the astonished onlookers see that they have been delivered... There can be little doubt that he was thinking of an event that could quite easily have taken place: but it also seems certain that the prophet was here making use of a tradition, and that neither the form of the story nor its various components were ad hoc creations.<sup>21</sup>

Could Isaiah have been intentionally employing after his own fashion, that which Burton Mack calls wisdom

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<sup>20</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), II, 151.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., II, 156.

"mytho-logy?" If so, it is not surprising to discover that in Isaiah 11:2 and 33:5-6 wisdom is associated with an eschatological blessing and apocalyptic endowment upon Jerusalem and the Messianic ruler, respectively. George Fohrer elaborates on the point as follows:<sup>22</sup>

According to Is. 11:2 the Spirit of Yahweh will fall on the Messianic ruler of the last time as a lasting possession; it is the spirit of Wisdom (hokmah), insight counsel, knowledge, and the fear of Yehweh, but also of strength... This special and enduring endowment with the spirit of Yahweh means that the mediated gifts of Wisdom in its various aspects and also of strength, surpass the normal human measure, so that the Messianic ruler of the last days can be God's vice-regent and execute the divine will with which he knows he is at one.

The details of this mythology provide one of several vital conceptual bridges from the Hebrew Messianic tradition to the Early Church's perception of Jesus as an eschatologized wisdom teacher, prophet and Messiah.<sup>23</sup>

One final characteristic of the wisdom literary tradition which should be mentioned is the use of metaphors and motifs taken from creation. Wedbee finds wisdom's influence in as widely diverse "locations" as in Deuteronomy 4:26;

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<sup>22</sup>George Fohrer, "Sophia," in Crenshaw, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup>The recent discovery of the Nag Hammadi Coptic Gnostic library also provides a bridge between the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament Wisdom material. It allows for the visualization of a trajectory of the "sayings of the sages" genre which may be traced from the earliest Jewish Wisdom literature through the Q source of the Gospels, through its aberrant "end" in Gnosticism. See: James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, Trajectories Through Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

30:19; and 31:28 when heaven and earth are involved as witnesses in the context of the covenant ceremony; in the hymnic literature of Isaiah 44:23 when the mountains and trees rejoice; in Job 20:27 where Zophar's speech includes creation imagery; and in Isaiah 1:2; Micah 6:1-2, Jeremiah 2:12 and Deuteronomy 31:1 when the heaven and earth are included as part of the indictment against Israel.<sup>24</sup>

In summary, it may be said that as a literary tradition wisdom includes many rhetorical and imagistic ornamental features, however its mythology is basically constituted of a definite set of motifs and forms around which its ornamental features constellate. The motifs of mundane tasks and relationships and natural elements are clear. The forms center around collections of instructional proverbs, metaphors and similes which are terse yet potent in their meaning and scope.

#### WISDOM AS AN ENTITY

Why did wisdom come to be seen as more than just a human or divine attribute? In Job 28 wisdom is seen as an uncreated, independent entity which God used as the regulative principle in creation... God appropriated wisdom for His purposes. He "saw it", "declared it", "probed it", "established it", and "searched it out." Yet at a

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<sup>24</sup>Wedbee, p. 42.

relatively "late" date (3rd or 4th C.C.E. in Proverbs and 2nd C.C.E. in Sirach), a personification was made of wisdom as an integrated unity of certain characteristics which stood in some location over and against God or humans. Though the fact of wisdom's personification is to some only "ornamental"<sup>25</sup> it is a unique and significant occurrence within our faith history which must be explored and re-appropriated by those to whom it is proven meaningful.

At one time, the gradual objectification of Wisdom was attributed to the influence of other Near Eastern religions. Now, however, it is generally accepted that the dependence upon non-Israelite sources is no more than stylistic, and then, only at certain points (e.g., Proverbs 8:22-31). Von Rad suggests that "ideas which had their roots elsewhere came to Israel's help when she needed them, in order to be able to progress in her thinking within her own domain. For in the process of this transference of foreign ideas to the Hebrew thought-world, many of them have become completely different."<sup>26</sup> My earlier introduction to Mack's concept of "mytho-logy" thesis further explicates this process.

In the personification of wisdom, Israel faced the question common to all ancient religions, of the religious

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<sup>25</sup> See Crenshaw, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Rad, Wisdom in Israel, p. 152.

provocation of humans by "the world."<sup>27</sup> However, the significant fact is that in doing so Israel did not agree to the mythicization and deification of this mysterious attribute of the world. She made a place for it within the sphere of her faith in God as creator. The subject which it addresses demands it. Von Rad states, "This world 'reason' was there before all works of creation, playing in the world like a child; like a favourite, she was the delight of God and, even from the very beginning, she was turned towards men in cheerful and playful disposition..."<sup>28</sup> Let us take a look at the poem itself for, as is the case with much of the wisdom material, Wisdom speaks best for herself.

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
 the first of his acts of old.  
 Ages ago I was set up at the first, before the  
 beginning of the earth.  
 When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
 when there were no springs abounding with water.  
 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills,  
 I was brought forth; before he had made the  
 earth with its fields, or the first of the dust  
 of the world.  
 When he established the heavens, I was there,  
 when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
 when he made firm the skies above,  
 when he established the fountains of the deep,  
 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that  
 the waters might not transgress his command,  
 when he marked out the foundations of the earth  
 then I was beside him, like a little child  
 and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 157.



always rejoicing in his inhabited world and  
delighting in the sons of men.

Proverbs 8:22-31

Although there is some dispute over the issue, Sophia is generally not regarded as a hypostasis of God. Though she is regarded as God's consort in the Wisdom of Solomon 9:4, we find that she is more mother, nurse, and friend to persons than a companion to God. (See Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16 and Ben Sirach 15:2) She is eternal (Sirach 24). She searches for persons to redeem them (Wisdom of Solomon 7:27). She sends messengers (through individuals and through the nation of Israel itself) (Proverbs 2:23), but both she and her envoys are rejected (Enoch 42). She withdraws herself from those who do not need her (Proverbs 2:24-31).

There is a unique quality of "divine call" which Sophia conveys to persons, and it is, strangely enough the call of the world. The whole of God's speech in the book of Job proceeds from the presupposition that God allows his creation to speak. In fact, says Von Rad, God gives to it the task of opening Job's eyes.<sup>29</sup>

But ask the beasts, and they will teach you;  
the birds of the air, and they will tell you:  
or the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;  
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.  
Who among all these does not know  
that the hand of the Lord has done this?

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

In his hand is the life of every living thing  
and the breath of all mankind.

Job 12:7-10 (RSV)

Sophia, as a giver of life, calling men to herself out of the creation, is a concept which existed for quite some time, according to Von Rad, without any consideration of theological problem of "compromise" with the Yahwistic traditions about salvation history.<sup>30</sup> In the rather late composition of Ben Sirach the union of the two traditions is brought about in a highly creative fashion, in which Sophia incorporates into herself the revelation of God in the tabernacle and in the Jerusalem temple. The primeval order is revealed in the form of the Torah. Sirach 24:3-11 stands out as a highly thoughtful piece of theological construction. It proceeds as follows:

From the mouth of the Most High I came forth.  
and mist like covered the earth.  
In the highest heavens did I dwell,  
my throne on a pillar of cloud.  
The vault of heaven I compassed alone,  
through the deep abyss I wandered.  
Over waves of the sea, over all the land  
over every people and nation I held sway.  
Among all these I sought a resting place;  
in whose inheritance should I abide?

Then the Creator of all gave me his command,  
and he who formed me chose the spot for my tent,  
Saying, 'In Jacob make your dwelling,  
in Israel your inheritance.'  
Before all ages, in the beginning, he created me,  
and through all ages I shall not cease to be.  
In the holy tent I ministered before him,  
and in Zion I fixed my abode.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

Thus in the chosen city he has given me rest,  
 in Jerusalem my domain.  
 I have struck root among the glorious people  
 in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.

Only in "God's chosen people" is Sophia able to flourish, only in the tabernacle is she able to find persons open to her insights. [The Tannaim further developed the identification of Wisdom with the Torah. (See Aboth 3:14)] The union is a happy one, for both traditions, until wisdom's unfortunate aberration in Gnostic speculation and its anti-creationism. The implications of Wisdom's flourishing with the Chosen People, though she is identified with creation in general, are illuminated in Paul's development of his concept of the sin of Gentiles in Romans 1:20 ff. Against the wisdom background, the discourse is clearly a statement of basic wisdom assumptions about the moral principles of God's judgment. It closely parallels the argument against nature worship found in the Wisdom of Solomon 13:1-9. It is fitting that this section on "Wisdom As An Entity" be concluded with a summary of that situation in which persons find themselves when they reject her and she withdraws herself from them. It is my estimation that the exegesis of Romans 1:20 ff. by C. K. Barrett provides more penetrating insight on the matter than does any Old Testament exegesis which I have located.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 31-32.

Therefore I hope my readers will bear with me for a rather brief excursus into the New Testament. Paul's connection with the Hellenistic wisdom tradition will be elaborated upon further in the next section. In Romans 1:20-23 (RSV) Paul states as follows:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse, for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.

In exegesis of the passage Barrett says the following:

As long as there has been a created universe, the invisible attributes of God are plainly seen. These invisible attributes are those which are mentioned in this verse; his eternal power, his very Godhead. That is what is clearly seen is that God is God and not man. Observation of created life is sufficient to show that creation does not provide the key to its own existence. Paul does not teach that there exists rational means of proving from creation that God exists. A mechanistic or fortuitous account of the universe never occurs to him. Of course, men set in God's world should have perceived that they were his creatures and that their Creator stood infinitely above them. In fact, those with whom Paul is here concerned, and whose sins he castigates in this chapter did not (for the most part) deny the existence of deity; but they did fail (v. 21) to give God due honor and praise.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to Romans (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 36.

It is clear that failure to give God "due honor and praise" in this context is paramount to failure to live in "fear of the Lord" as it is traditionally defined by wisdom. Wisdom can not be found without first opening oneself in awe and reverence for the mystery of God. Paul's use of the language of "futility" of thinking and the "darkening" of senseless thoughts echoes the language of the Wisdom of Solomon 11:15-16:

And in return for their senseless, wicked thoughts which misled them into worshipping dumb serpents and worthless insects. You sent upon them swarms of dumb creatures for vengeance; that they might recognize that a man is punished by the very things through which he sins.

The wisdom concepts are clarified by Barrett as he describes its use by Paul, whom he claims "deepens them in the using."<sup>33</sup> Barrett concludes his commentary on Romans 1:20:23 by saying the following:

Idolatry is not the end of the story. It was a commonplace of Jewish propaganda that false worship led to moral depravity (e.g. Wisdom 14:12), and that idolatry was punished by God with a punishment made to fit the crime (e.g. Wisdom 11:15 f.). Paul uses these beliefs, but deepens them in the using. On the one hand, he understands idolatry acutely enough to perceive that the idol-hating Jew himself is not free from it (ch. 2): on the other, he has a far more terrible sense of the punishment of idolatry--the man who worships beasts is not (as in Wisdom 11) devoured by them, but becomes like them.<sup>34</sup>

So it seems that Sophia calls to us through the beasts, the

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>34</sup>Barrett, p. 38.

birds, and the plants, but if we do not heed her call, indeed, if we reject her, she leaves us not only to be devoured by them, but worse, to become like them.

The personification of wisdom as a feminine entity can be seen as a logical extension of the metaphorical and personal nature of the Israelite people's unique understanding--of the ordered workings of God in the creation. It is not strange that Wisdom's personification should be feminine, as her metaphoric mode of knowing is needed to holistically complement and balance the predominantly masculine perspective of the salvation history tradition. As a nurturer of human life who mediates in and through God's creation it is natural that she should be regarded as an eternally loving mother and a nurse who guards the moral purity of God's children.

#### WISDOM AS A STYLE OF TEACHING AND COUNSEL

In terms of both teaching and counsel, wisdom's empiricism, though it did not concern itself with cultic practices, assumed that in the last "analysis" the order of Creation was apprehended by faith. Therefore, a teacher of wisdom weighed ethical and cultic actions against each other in light of that process of creation towards which he or she remained turned. Von Rad states, "The process in which he found himself was turned to him and his conduct in a relationship of correspondence: it was ready to adapt

itself to him in blessing and furtherance, but it was also in a position to affect him penally."<sup>35</sup> For the wisdom tradition the order of the world is assumed to be open and flexible, and capable of being comprehended by human intelligence; but the mode of argument used by teachers remains ultimately theological "in that it denies the creature the possibility of providing a representation of the Creator."<sup>36</sup>

The instruction (musar) and counsel (esah) of the sages was permeated by a rather tedious moralizing tone as they perceived "chaos" to be threatening the people of Israel through societal and filial deterioration. While the sages often exhorted against graft, extortion, power politics, luxury, sensuality, and abandonment of old family ideals they also enlivened their discourses with a wide variety of lighthearted riddles, acrostic puzzles, humorous maxims, etc. The Song of Solomon gives witness to a "healthy" regard for the sensuous beauty of the natural world. As mentioned earlier, the sages made much use of metaphor and parable to paint attractive and vivid pictures for their students. Walther Zimmerli stresses the fact that the aim of the wisdom teachers was for the free assent of their students rather than obedience.<sup>37</sup> One

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<sup>35</sup> Rad, Old Testament Theology, I, 428.

<sup>36</sup> Rad, Wisdom in Israel, p. 185.

<sup>37</sup> Crenshaw, p. 22, quoting Zimmerli.

wonders at times, if their mytho-poetic style was not an attempt to "lure" their students towards the "hard" truths of wisdom. To today's educator who tries laboriously to make his way through Ben Sirach's "catalogue" of moral instruction, the non-authoritative style of teaching is not immediately recognisable. However, the warmth and openness of wisdom's theological humanism is quite obvious when it is compared to the categorical demands and prohibitions of the cultic and legal spheres of the salvation-history tradition (e.g. Leviticus).

Educational settings included private instruction at home, general instruction at gatherings of the faithful, and school training. Emerging out of these settings were two major styles or objectives of wisdom presentation: instruction or precept (*musar*) and counsel (*esah*). R.B.Y. Scott indicates that the difference between the two styles was based primarily on the relation of the wisdom student to the teacher.<sup>38</sup> Instructions or precepts were given in connection with the authority of parents, tribal or community custom and judicial officiation; whereas counsel was sought voluntarily. The sage's only authority lay in the prestige they derived from their special competence. "Such were the royal counselors and local sages who could be consulted by the common people," says Scott, "then the

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<sup>38</sup>R.B.Y. Scott, The Way of Wisdom (New York: Macmillan, 1976), p. 49.



advice might be rejected..."<sup>39</sup> Within the school setting, wisdom teachers built upon both styles of authority. Their hard work and constant devotion was a matter of great rigor. However, in comparison to the intellectual and esoteric wisdom teachings of surrounding nations, Israel's sages maintained an earthy, humble, democratic and progressive style of teaching.

It has been previously noted that the way of wisdom may be characterized by an inclusivistic didactic mode. The use of paradox and contradictions (juxtaposed contrasts) was a way of implicitly presenting and "demanding" consideration of "all" possible variables. Such a teaching style is accompanied by a high valuation of propriety and the discernment of "timeliness."<sup>40</sup> Even today, wisdom is often loosely defined as the ability to discern the "right" time and place for a particular behavior. The concept of "appointed time" and its extension into apocalyptic thinking emerged from wisdom's didactic valuation of "timeliness" in conjunction with growing theological awareness.<sup>41</sup>

Discernment of timeliness and the virtue of moderation are of a like kind of wisdom. Wisdom's topics

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>40</sup> Crenshaw, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Rad, Wisdom in Israel, p. 264.

of instruction included the "wise" moderation of joy, wine, food, music, and amusement. Stability, solidarity and contentedness are goals of wisdom instruction. They are reflected in commendations of agrarian pursuits (Proverbs 27:23-27), and warnings against unjust amassing of wealth and "get-rich-quick" commercial pursuits (Ben Sirach 26:28-27:4). God is seen as the creator of both the rich and the poor. Mercy and justice is to be had for all because God is creator over all. By similar reasoning, suffering and death are also accepted as good. Basic issues of social responsibility and the common good are approached through the dynamics of the simple life, the integrity of the home and mutual respect of one another's rights.

Marriage is given a high value as a divine/human model (Ben Sirach 36:26-28, 29:18-20). The fundamental purpose of it is to preserve the kin and family.<sup>42</sup> Marriage is recognized as having a personal and psychological foundation... As might be expected from wisdom's "rule" of moderation, monogamy and a high degree of chastity are valued.<sup>43</sup> Moral purity of daughters is emphasized over "good-looks" (Ben Sirach 36:23-26).

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<sup>42</sup>Joseph W. Gaspar, Social Ideas in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), p. 167.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

At this juncture it is appropriate to address the issue of women and the wisdom teachings of Israel. Most certainly, the religious and moral objectives of the teachings of Wisdom were equally applicable to both men and women. How must this be viewed in contrast to the often cited evidence for misogyny within the wisdom teachings? I would like to stress once again the central valuation of family solidarity, domestic affairs and parental instruction and the fact that the mother is seen to have equal, if not supreme authority in such matters.<sup>44</sup> Indeed the father remains the nucleus of the family and the "ruling will" in the community, however, his power is conditioned (as is the mother's) by the valuation of family solidarity. It should be noted that the father's authority is not regarded as a privilege but a duty (see Ben Sirach 33:20-24, Proverbs 27:8).<sup>45</sup>

The praise of "the good wife" in Proverbs 31:10-31 represents more than just the praise of the menial tasks done by women in building up the household. Proverbs 31:26 speaks as well of her possession of wisdom. It is the teaching or "law" of kindness which is upon her tongue. The instructional responsibility of women is for the early childhood training of sons as well as daughters. She

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 31-32.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

provides a lived and intimate example of wisdom's moral values and religious teachings. Gaspar rightly warns that the silence of the wisdom teachings about the "wisdom training" of women should not be taken as a sign of its complete absence.<sup>46</sup>

There is one final and most unusual characteristic of the wisdom style of instruction and counsel which we must explore. It centers around the sage's desire to bring the past radically to bear on the present in terms of a decision of human free will. In a manner quite unlike that of the salvation-history tradition, the wisdom sages present the events in Israel's history from the garden of Eden to the Red Sea as occasions for clearly delineated teaching. Von Rad tells us, "The motives of divine action are clear for all to see; history has become, rationally and morally, completely transparent. Thus, the author also succeeds in making it contemporary with a forcefulness which had not hitherto been granted to Israel... The knowledge of man and of the human psyche which finds expression in this presentation of history is, of course, very subtle... Especially in the descriptions of how men are ensnared by blindness, anxiety, and other dark things..."<sup>47</sup>

The wisdom account brings the history psychologically

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>47</sup>Rad, Wisdom in Israel, p. 283.

alive for the present in a way that nurtures hope and openness to God's mercy. Wisdom tells "tales of old" in such a way as to especially broaden and deepen the "now" moment, creating a space for revelation--for repentance and forgiveness. Wisdom of Solomon gives account of Sophia's protection of her followers during the Exodus as follows:

The holy people and blameless race--it was she  
 who delivered them from the nation that oppressed  
 them...  
 She took them across The Red Sea  
 and brought them through the deep waters--  
 But their enemies she overwhelmed,  
 and cast them up from the bottom of the depths.

(Wisdom 11:15, 18, 19 NAB)

The story sounds familiar until we receive Sophia's special lesson:

Therefore the just despoiled the wicked;  
 and they sang, O Lord, your holy name  
 and praised in unison your conquering  
 hand--  
 Because Wisdom opened the mouths of the dumb,  
 and gave ready speech to infants--

(Wisdom 11:20-21 NAB)

The lesson is driven deeper:

They journeyed through the unhabited desert,  
 and in solitudes they pitched their tents;  
 They withstood enemies and took vengeance on  
 their foes--  
 When they thirsted, they called upon you,  
 and water was given them from the sheer  
 rock,  
 assuagement for their thirst from the hard stone.  
For by the things through which their foes were  
punished  
They in their need were benefited.

(Wisdom 11:2-5 NAB, my emphasis)

A lengthy digression on God's mercy interrupts the narrative and drives wisdom's point home in vivid language:

For with you great strength abides always:  
 who can resist the might of your arm?  
 Indeed, before you the whole universe is as a grain  
 from a balance,  
 or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.  
 But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things:  
 and you overlook the sins of men that they may repent.  
 For you love all things that are  
 and loathe nothing that you have fashioned.  
 And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it;  
 or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?  
 But you spare all things, because they are yours, O Lord  
 and lover of souls.  
 for your imperishable spirit is in all things:  
 Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little,  
 warn them, and remind them of the sins they are committing,  
 that they may abandon their wickedness  
 and believe in you, O Lord!

For truly, the ancient inhabitants of your holy land,  
 whom you hated for deeds most odious--  
 Works of witchcraft and impious sacrifices;  
 a cannibal feast of human flesh and blood...  
 You willed to destroy by the hands of our fathers,  
 that the land that is dearest of all to you  
 might receive a worthy colony of God's children.  
 But even these, as they were men, you spared,  
 and sent wasps as forerunners of your army  
 that they might exterminate them by degrees...  
 Condemning them bit by bit, you gave them space  
 for repentance.

(Wisdom 11:21-12:10 NAB)

The "now" moment is seen in light of its "pregnant possibilities" for life. Wisdom's stories clearly promotes the exercise of human free will by individual persons amidst a "space for repentance" created by the soft focus of its mytho-poetic style.

The wisdom books of Ecclesiastes and Ben Sirach represent another interesting "mutation" of time. Von Rad

calls it a "pre-apocalyptic" perspective.<sup>48</sup> The issues of the divine determination of times is traced from the very trivial and mundane to the "big" decisions about life and death; salvation and judgment. All things are seen as having their destinies determined "from the beginning". (Strangely enough, the fact of human free will and responsibility is not questioned, in spite of this fact.) On this platform apocalyptic thought was borne. The influence of Persian dualistic tendencies may have painted the picture of the "battle" between good and evil more vividly, but the logic of their difference is unsurpassably conveyed in the following passage from Ben Sirach (33:7-15 NAB):

Why is one day more important than another,  
 when it is the sun that lights up every day?  
 It is due to the Lord's wisdom that they differ;  
 it is through him the seasons and feasts come and go.  
 Some he dignifies and sanctifies,  
 and others he lists as ordinary days.  
 So too, all men are of clay,  
 for from earth man was formed;  
 Yet with his great knowledge the Lord makes men unlike;  
 in different paths he has them walk.  
 Some he blesses and makes great,  
 some he sanctifies and draws to himself.  
 Others he curses and brings low,  
 and expels them from their place.  
 Like clay in the hands of a potter,  
 to be molded according to his pleasure,  
 So are men in the hands of the Creator,  
 to be assigned by him their function.  
 As evil contrasts with good, and death with life,  
 so are sinners in contrast with the just;  
 See now all the works of the Most High:  
 they come in pairs, the one the opposite of the other.

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 264.

We are told by Von Rad that there must have been circles among the schools of Israel which regarded it as their main task to refer a person to "that voice which sounded through the medium of creation and to bring him to the point of entrusting to this form of revelation, his life with all its possibilities of conflict."<sup>49</sup> We can imagine the didactic poem quoted above in just such a setting in the second century B.C.E. during the period of strife leading up to the Maccabean Revolt (167 B.C.E.) and the apocalyptic "blossoming" of Daniel. In this setting, with its intellectual distance from cultic and legal formulations one can see the perserverance of the "space for repentance," and trust in the basic beneficence of Creation which is Israel's through Wisdom.

Whether wisdom teaching "transforms" time and "creates" a space for repentance through metaphorically interpreting and "psychologizing" past history (as in the Wisdom of Solomon 11:21 ff.): or in exploring the breadth and the depth of a spectrum of possibilities (as in Ben Sirach 33:7-15); wisdom never fails to remind persons of their limitations, and their need for awe and reverence before the mystery of God. Existence remains confessional, even "doxological," before the awesome splendor of the self-revelation of the orders of Creation. "There is no

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 164.



attempt to achieve a theoretical, self-contained picture of the world, no ideal picture of man to which man was to be led out of himself, no scientific construction of a system, but, rather, a noticeable caution with regard to comprehensive attempts at explanations; in contrast to this, there is an unfinished dialogue about man and world on the basis of an awareness of the ambivalence of recorded phenomena, preference for the (sometimes contingent) event over any logos, ... without claiming complete knowledge, of a unique kind of truth," says Von Rad in his conclusion to Wisdom in Israel.<sup>50</sup>

The wisdom way of teaching and counsel is therefore non-authoritarian, stressing free assent rather than obedience; mundane and practical, yet theological at base; playfully metaphorical and even humorous at times. It concerns itself with issues of moral purity, social responsibility and the common good; and it stresses integrity in the home and mutual respect for one another's rights. It commends agrarian pursuits and warns against amassing wealth (especially by get-rich-quick means). For wisdom, kairos time rules over chronos time and God's future is open to those who concern themselves with discernment of timeliness and moderation as they "tread softly" through the order of the created world.

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 318.

## WISDOM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The incredible span and complexity of the wisdom trajectory as it is seen in the four major trends summarized in the preceeding sections serves to explain how it is that the authors of the New Testament, and indeed, Jesus himself, probably needed only to sketch very lightly the framework of wisdom's religious perspectives, formulations, mytho-poetic material, and institutions, as a context for their understandings of the workings of God in the world. The wisdom movement was a widespread but diverse cultural phenomenon in the Jewish-Hellenistic philosophic/religious environment in which the early Church had its birth. This fact has not been given adequate importance in Protestant Biblical theology. Indeed, the wisdom tradition played a particularly significant part in the Christologies of Matthew and Mark, building upon the source Q. This will be discussed in some detail along with the Wisdom characteristic of the teachings of Jesus (the parables). I will only briefly summarize the presence of the wisdom tradition in other New Testament sources.

### Wisdom in the Q Source

As I have already mentioned, one finds styles of utterances in the New Testament similar to that of wisdom literature, however, "wisdom" is not properly designated as

a literary category within the New Testament. The most notable facet of scholarly analysis of New Testament literary categories, for our purposes, is the hypothetical existence of a "collection of sayings" document (called Q, as I have already mentioned) which the author of Matthew included in his rendition of the "basic" Gospel narrative of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It is assumed that Jesus probably used styles and forms of the wisdom tradition in his preaching such as parables, proverbs, metaphors, etc. However it is also to be assumed that the absorption of a part of a collection of wisdom sayings (Q) into a collection of Jesus' authentic sayings occurred as various layers of the tradition made interpretations appropriate to their own tradition.

The appearance of the wisdom literary genre in the Synoptics is complicated by the tendency of the genre to move swiftly into its Gnostic variants. These variants "detached" wisdom from its work within creation and diminished the central incarnational meaning of Jesus' life and death. Therefore, Matthew's appropriation of the "Q" sayings is not without modification of Q's understandings about wisdom. Suggs suggests that "Matthew's problem with Q stemmed from the fact that in his community the document was being interpreted in a gnosticizing fashion, not from his distrust of the form as such."<sup>51</sup> Detailed textual

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<sup>51</sup>Jack M. Suggs, Wisdom, Christology and Law in

analysis which substantiates this position can only be briefly summarized here in terms of several significant passages.

The Q document interprets Jesus as a messenger of Sophia. He is given a position "below" her and as the last, and "highest" of her envoys (Matthew 23:34-37a//Luke 11:49-51). Suggs explains that for Q the Matthew 23 (//Luke 11) passage is addressed to the "final generation" in which wisdom's prophecy of doom is to be fulfilled... which Q interprets (using the form of direct address) to be contemporary with both Jesus and the primitive community which transmitted the saying. This represents a convergence of Jewish wisdom literature, with apocalypticism, and the Israelite Salvation-History tradition. For Matthew and Luke "this generation" must refer to the persecution of Christians, due to the passage of time.<sup>52</sup> As the term "prophets" is extended to include the disciples of Jesus, Jesus is again identified with wisdom.

In Q there is no idea of the redemptive significance of the suffering of wisdom's representatives. The Q emphasis is on the vindication and exaltation of wisdom's messenger as a revelation of the truth of his claim. This "righteous one" is in the tradition of the Wisdom of

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Matthew's Gospel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 9.

<sup>52</sup>James M. Robinson, "Jesus as Sophos and Sophia: Wisdom Tradition and the Gospels," in Robert Wilken (ed.)

Solomon and is not historical, but "typical" as wisdom's ideal representative.<sup>53</sup> Therefore in Q, Suggs says, there is no true Christology but only a "Sophialogy" (which "invites" Gnosticizing interpretation since Jesus' teaching is the saving event).<sup>54</sup>

#### Wisdom in Matthew

Matthew identifies Jesus as the "wisdom of God" as he also adds the logion of the "easy yoke" (Matthew 11:28-30) in which Wisdom invites persons to take upon themselves her "yoke" which is the Torah. (The parallels to this addition are Sirach 51:23 ff.) The yoke of Jesus is the yoke of the true Torah of wisdom set over against that of the Pharisaic Torah, as the two Sabbath pericopes from Mark (Matthew 12:1-8 and 12:9-14) clearly demonstrate. The new yoke is "easy", it should be noted, not in the sense of a weakening of the law's demand, but in the sense of leading persons toward free assent to a Lord who is gracious and life-giving. The necessity of obedience and discipline is stressed by Matthew's interpretation of the Son of Man as the eschatological figure who will come to

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Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>53</sup>Suggs, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

judge the Church on the basis of its "obedience to Jesus as the Torah present in their midst."<sup>55</sup> Matthew's presentation of Jesus' relation to the law is an identification of Jesus--Wisdom--Torah which sees the law being corrected, extended, deepened, and fulfilled in the living presence of the life of the Spirit in the community of believers.<sup>56</sup> This is amplified by the naming of Jesus as the Son of Man. In the Son of Man tradition in I Enoch 37-71 we see that "In him (that is, the Son of Man) dwells the spirit of wisdom, and the spirit which gives insight, and the spirit of understanding and might."

Matthew represents a legal emphasis and an emphasis on the redemptive passion and resurrection of Jesus in a way which very importantly corrects and makes use of (and therefore does not abolish) the wisdom tradition as it appears in Q. Suggs indicates that in Q we are confronted by pneumatics (similar to those addressed by Paul in Corinth) who "claim an immediate and ultimate relation to the Spirit which renders their allegiance to Jesus secondary."<sup>57</sup>

### Wisdom in Mark

The identification of Wisdom--Jesus--Son of Man is

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<sup>55</sup>R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, Pre-Existence, Wisdom and the Son of Man (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 26.

<sup>56</sup>Suggs, p. 49.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

subtle in the Synoptics. It is never directly stated. The interest in the tradition is not in the relationship between them, but in their common expression of the heavenly dignity of Jesus. One designation is not an alternative to the other. In Mark, where most of the emphasis is put on the Son of Man, the wisdom myth seems to appear in the background in chapter 6... in the mention of wisdom and the rejection of Jesus by his homeland (which is central to the wisdom mythologia). Mark apparently incorporates and goes far beyond some of the Q traditions in his explicit emphasis on the Passion and exaltation theme. His Jesus is the suffering figure of Daniel 7, and also the highly exalted heavenly Son of Man and Son of God.

#### Wisdom in the Pauline Writings

Paul shares the common apocalyptic theology of the earliest congregations. There is evidence, however, in Galatians that he thinks of the pre-existent Christ in terms of the myth of the pre-existent wisdom who enters occasionally into men in the course of the salvation history. Particularly in Galatians 4:4 and 6 the formula 'God sent forth His Son' must be considered with Romans 8:3, John 3:16ff, and I John 4:9 as a reference to wisdom in its "Hellenistic Jewish garb" as identified with Logos.<sup>58</sup> In

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<sup>58</sup>R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, p. 111.

the Corinthian correspondence the issue of false doctrines of partisans who claim 'Wisdom' is primary. Paul contrasts their "wisdom of this world" with the foolishness of the cross and he eventually asserts that there is a Christian wisdom. Hamerton-Kelly summarizes the Pauline perspective in I Corinthians 1-2:

It is the wisdom of God, contained in a mystery, ordained by God before the ages for our glory, and unknown to the rulers of this age. Because they did not know this wisdom, these rulers crucified the 'Lord of Glory'; but to the Christians has been given to know its content, namely, the things which God has prepared for those who love him... This knowledge comes emphatically by the Spirit and not by 'words of human wisdom.'<sup>59</sup>

Paul's use of the term wisdom is taken to mean the revelation of God's plan for salvation as a whole of which Christ's humiliation and crucifixion are a part.

The wisdom of Paul's Corinthian opponents is precisely that which makes them regard themselves as powerful, fulfilled, rich, and ruling (I Corinthians 4:8), such that they despise the humiliation of the Cross (I Corinthians 1:18ff). Their wisdom is apparently one of "self-realization" (I Corinthians 4:7). Paul seems to side with the kind of wisdom represented by Abraham and Jacob which entails the effort of a going outside oneself, for the reception of wisdom. This is in contrast to the mystical tradition represented by Philo which assumes

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 113.



wisdom to be had "by nature" (consubstantiality) in persons such as Moses and Isaac. The great debate about the resurrection in I Corinthians 15 has to do with the recognition of the "gap" between humans and God in the maintenance of the eschatological reservation--the "not yet" along with the "already." When faced by Hellenistic mysticism, Paul resorts to the categories of Jewish apocalyptic.<sup>60</sup>

In I Corinthians 8:6 Paul directly identifies Christ with hypostatized Wisdom as the mediator of creation. In I Corinthians 10:4 he makes a similar reference through the use of a moral allegory of Christ as the "Rock" which followed the Israelites.<sup>61</sup>

The Corinthian correspondences demonstrates the major threat to the preservation of the creation-affirming Hebrew wisdom tradition posed by its encounter with Hellenistic mysticism and its dualistic conceptions. Paul, like his contemporary, Philo, tried to clarify the Judaeo-Christian stance by use of both wisdom and Hellenistic language. Unlike Paul, Philo confused many more issues than he clarified. Paul's preservation of wisdom within an apocalyptic framework was, and is still, a significant bridge "between" the Hebrew and the Graeco-Roman

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

conceptual worlds. Paul values mytical experience (see II Corinthians 12:1-5) such as the gnosticizing tradition emphasizes, but he puts it "in its place" such that it does not involve participation in or return to a spiritual origin (as Philo and the Gnostics would have it). The "in-the-world" mysticism of Paul, if one can call it that, remains a wisdom style of mysticism characterized by the reception of new gifts of creation through faith in the grace of the incarnate God. Paul's insight into the dynamics of this reality and its use of the wisdom resources provides a singularly significant set of guidelines for the creation of a wisdom style of ministry.

#### Wisdom of the Parables of Jesus

As stated earlier, wisdom is not an explicit literary genre within the New Testament. However, it's perspective on life, its literary motifs and metaphorical style, and its didactic formulations are reflected clearly in the teachings of the historical Jesus. We shall proceed to outline these three wisdom aspects and to suggest examples of parables in which they are reflected.<sup>62</sup> Persons approaching the teachings of Jesus both for inspiration and education in metaphor, should be aware of scholarly analyses of the parameters of the actual teachings of this historical

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<sup>62</sup>See Appendix for a complete index of the parables.

Jesus. The work of John Dominic Crossan is most helpful for the practical interests of an enterprise such as ours.<sup>63</sup> His position is well informed by the debates of the classical scholars such as C.H. Dodd, C.O. Via, Joachim Jeremias, R.W. Funk, Norman Perrin et al., yet he stirs us to consider certain "radical" implications of Jesus' parables which have heretofore been neglected. They align Jesus' purposes very closely to the purposes which we have said are those of wisdom. One of his theses is that through the parables Jesus proclaimed "permanent eschatology" or "the permanent presence of God" as the one who "challenges world" and shatters its complacency repeatedly. The spirit of wisdom's "walking in fear of the Lord" is heard in the following statement about the Kingdom of God as presented in Jesus' parables.

Be it the world of demonic possession, of enriched security, or elsewhere, of Pharisaic righteousness, the Kingdom is that which in shaking man's world at its foundations establishes the dominion of God over and against such world... If Jesus forbade calculations of the signs of the end, it was not calculations, nor signs, but end he was attacking. God, in Kingdom, is the One who poses permanent and unceasing challenge to man's ultimate concern and thereby keeps world free from idolatry and open in its uncertainty.<sup>64</sup>

As radical as this approach sounds, it is not too unlike wisdom's "transformation of time" about which we have spoken earlier. For Crossan it is a type of "linguistic

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<sup>63</sup>John Dominic Crossan, In Parables (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

eschatology" which comes into play when one humbly responds to the metaphorical challenge of Jesus' parables.<sup>65</sup>

The elements of the wisdom tradition which Jesus seems to have "radicalized" in his teachings about the Kingdom of God will be enumerated in the next three sections, along with examples of parables which reflect particular wisdom perspectives on life literary motifs, or metaphors, and styles of teaching.

1) Wisdom's perspective on life has been seen to focus around a general optimism about the beneficence of God, especially in the created order of things. In the parables of Jesus this optimism is radicalized in terms of the coming of the Kingdom of God as an amazing and surprising gift of grace. According to Crossan, The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-8, Matthew 13:3-8, Luke 8:5-8 and Gos. Thom. 82:3-13) and the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32, Matthew 13:31-31, Luke 13:18-19, Gos. Thom. 84:26-33) convey the coming of the Kingdom in terms of the miracle of natural growth... an amazing gift which we might easily overlook from our "biologically educated" perspective.

Wisdom's optimism about the beneficence of God also functions in the context of the hiddenness and mystery of God's ways. Crossan's analysis of The Parable of the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

Budding Fig Tree (Mark 13:28, Matthew 24:32, Luke 21:29-30) and the Leaven (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21, Gos. Thom. 94:3-6) indicates that their main emphasis is the hiddenness and mystery of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Finally, Crossan outlines the themes of discovery and joy in the advent of the Kingdom of God as they are seen in The Parables of the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-13, Luke 15:4-6, Gos. Thom. 98:22-27) and the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-9).<sup>66</sup> Indeed, wisdom's "way" has been shown consistently to emphasize the path of exploration for and joyous discovery of God's great love and mercy. The above named wisdom elements are tied to wisdom's "practical mysticism" which transforms the past and the future in terms of the moment of decision in the present.

2) The majority of the parables of Jesus utilize and transform Wisdom motifs centering around the mundane tasks of simple living [e.g., The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-9)]; familial relationships and social convention [e.g., The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and The Parable of the Proper Guests (Luke 14:12-14)] and the natural elements [e.g., The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)]. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) and The Parable of the Great Supper (Matthew 22:1-10, Luke 14:16-24, Gos. Thom. 97:2-6)

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 38ff.

exemplify wisdom's universalistic and humanistic tendencies. In the parables, wisdom meets us at the "crossroads of life" in parables such as The Campaign Planner (Luke 14:31-32), The Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-7), and The Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-20, Gos. Thom. 92:3-10).

3) Jesus' didactic formulations represent wisdom's trend towards terse yet potent instructional proverbs, metaphors and similies. They "directly" correct, reprove and attack through indirect means paradoxically. Joachim Jeremias suggests for example that the Parable of the Prodigal Son can be seen as a defense for Jesus' dinner table association with sinners.<sup>67</sup> The parables radicalize the classical wisdom notions about moral purity and obedience. It is seen that God leads to obedience, rather than obedience leading to God. In line with wisdom's emphasis on human limitation, they attack the basic assumption of human achievement of moral perfection. As is the custom of the wisdom tradition, the mystery of God and his action in the world are seen to preclude closure on any system of religious and moral explanation. The parables "ask beyond." As Crossan says, "we find ourselves standing firmly on utter uncertainty."<sup>68</sup> We can only walk humbly, speak in proverbs and parables, and trust in God.

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., Preface Quote from J. Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, p. 21, 131-132.

<sup>68</sup>Crossan, p. 80.

In conclusion, it can be said that Jesus humbly walked the path of wisdom as he journeyed forth daily on the road in openness to "synchronistic" events--(timely, meaningful coincidences) through which teachings of God's wisdom could be seen and learned, metaphorically. While many of Jesus' parables reversed people's expectations about the nature of God's work in the world, so likewise did Jesus' behavior, such as he associated with sinners and "street people." In the tradition of the sages who gave free counsel (esah) to those who asked it of them, he made himself available to all.

#### Wisdom in the Christological Hymns

A summary approach to the rest of the wisdom resources within the New Testament will be made through a special analysis of the background of the mythological content of the Christological hymns found scattered throughout. In Philippians 2:5-11 one finds an example of a type of Christological hymn which arose in the context of worship in the Early Church, most probably out of a matrix of Jewish-Hellenistic wisdom speculation.<sup>69</sup> Until recently such hymns were regarded as being built upon a

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<sup>69</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Wisdom Mythology and Christological Hymns of the New Testament," in Wilken, p. 18. Schüssler-Fiorenza also cites hymns found in I Tim. 3:16; Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 2:14-16; Heb. 1:3; I Peter 1:20, 3:18, 22; and the prologue of John's gospel.

a basic redeemer myth.

The basic pattern for the redeemer myth included the following eight elements as reconstructed by J. Sanders:

- 1) The possessor of unity or equality with God  
(Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15, 17; Heb. 1:3; John 1:1).
- 2) The mediator or agent in creation  
(Col. 1:16; John 1:3).
- 3) A part or sustainer of creation  
(Col. 1:15, 17f.; Heb. 1:3, John 1:4).
- 4) Descended from the heavenly to the earthly realm  
(Phil. 2:7; John 1:5-9).
- 5) One who dies  
(Phil. 2:8; Col. 1:18; I Tim. 3:16; I Peter 3:18).
- 6) And is made alive again  
(Col. 1:18; I Tim. 3:16; I Peter 3:18).
- 7) One who effects reconciliation  
(Col. 1:18, 19f.; Eph. 2:14-16; I Tim. 3:16; I Peter 3:19; Heb. 1:3).
- 8) Exalted and enthroned and to whom the cosmic powers become subject  
(Phil. 2:9-11; I Tim 3:16; I Peter 3:22; Heb. 1:3).<sup>70</sup>

The above pattern is helpful, however, it should be noted that recent analysis of the hymns and their wisdom background by Elisabeth-Schüssler Fiorenza<sup>71</sup> amplifies the point made by Conzelmann that there is no single wisdom (or Gnostic) myth to be found, but only the series of mythological elements, the predecessor for which is the syncretistic goddess most widely known as Isis.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 29.



The perception of wisdom as a series of mythological elements is significant for seeing the wisdom tradition as enriching and "holistically complementing" the salvation history tradition with its imaginative mythopoetic material. The unity of their theological interests can be maintained, but the two trajectories may be seen to express two significantly different modes of perception and understanding. Such a conceptualization demands that wisdom mytho-logy, be regarded less as a causative agent and more as a product of a wisdom mode of understanding.

Consequently, I differ with Schüssler Fiorenza on the motive for the use of wisdom as reflective mythology. Rather than apologetic or missionary purposes, I see the underlying primary motive as that of psychological imbalance. In her analysis of the Wisdom of Solomon and its patterning after the Isis aretalogies, Schüssler-Fiorenza comes close to recognizing this fact:

The author of the Wisdom of Solomon...was able to deal with the craving of men and women in the Hellenistic age for the unification with God and the salvation of the soul. Since human reason was inadequate to direct man's life he turned to mysticism, philosophical contemplation, and the mystery religions in order to gain union with a transcendent reality. This religious atmosphere presented a challenge to the believing Jew. The author of the Wisdom of Solomon wanted to give his fellow believers and expression of their revealed beliefs that could match the depth of the religious sentiments of the Isis literature and cult.<sup>73</sup> (my emphasis)

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

The argument cited above does not necessarily lead to the apologetic and missionary needs of Hellenistic Judaism as Schussler-Fiorenza assumes. Indeed, the reintroduction of a feminine principle into theology can be seen as an attempt to right the "hormonal" imbalance in the Godhead which occurred with the triumph of Yahwism.<sup>74</sup>

In closing it should be stressed that we must respect the wisdom tradition for its reflective quality and not fear the use of its mytho-logia. Schüssler-Fiorenza warns that the mythical features of the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the preexistent, cosmic Lord (who mediated in the creation) are "so strong" that the references to the human life of Jesus Christ "are in danger of being swallowed up by them."<sup>75</sup> However, I propose that the best defense against Christ-myth tendencies within the realm of wisdom is to keep before one Paul's stress on the theology of the cross and in conjunction with it to keep before one the depth and breadth of the wisdom tradition of the ancient Israelites. Never does this tradition "soar" into other-worldliness, mystic flights of fantasy, or prideful social elitism. It at once stimulates and disciplines the imagination to new dimensions of relationship with oneself, society, and world.

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<sup>74</sup>Raphael Patai, The Hebrew Goddess (New York: KTAV, 1967), pp. 138-140.

<sup>75</sup>Schüssler-Fiorenza, p. 36.

## Chapter 3

CONTEMPORARY RESOURCES FOR CREATING A  
WISDOM STYLE OF MINISTRY

The wisdom tradition assumes that creation and human life are bound inextricably in an interdependent relationship. The health and growth of one is bound up with the other. What is wisdom's insight into the chaos and destruction which currently plagues our global eco-system? The complexity and ambiguity of the situation is enormous. But wisdom's way tells us that this complexity and ambiguity need not be overwhelming. Perception of reality through wisdom's metaphorical mode incorporates these very elements as tools for revelation of the mysteries of God. In addition, wisdom teaches us to trust in the overall beneficence--the creative growth potential--of creation. We are to harmonize with it our potentially destructive human growth efforts by cultivation of inner purity and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. Therefore, contemporary resources for creating a wisdom style of ministry are to be found primarily among those schools of thought which recognize the importance of metaphorical creativity and communication; the centrality of personal spiritual growth within a wider context of global consciousness; and the positive growth potential existing

within the very nature of life itself.

Within the realm of pastoral counseling and Christian education, the recent work of Howard Clinebell serves as an excellent "map" of wisdom's current resources. Within the "spiritual growth" stream of psychotherapy, he outlines depth psychological (Jungian), Gestalt (Perls), Psychosynthesis (Assaghioli) and various other existentialist therapy and pastoral counseling resources.<sup>1</sup> These resources, seen in conjunction with Clinebell's own concept of Growth Counseling<sup>2</sup> meet wisdom's three criteria as set out above. Their implications "spill over" into teaching and preaching as well as counseling. Clinebell outlines six interdependent dimensions of human growth: minds, bodies, relationships with other people, the biosphere, the groups and institutions that sustain us, and the spiritual dimension of our lives. The wisdom minister, like Clinebell's "growth-oriented" counselor, helps a person maximize and balance growth in all six facets.<sup>3</sup> Clinebell forwards the notion that "fresh growth usually begins in one's inner life, or one's relationships, though it may begin in other dimensions."<sup>4</sup> This sounds very much like

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<sup>1</sup>Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Contemporary Growth Therapies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup>Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

Von Rad's description of wisdom as a matter of right attitude and "folly" as a lack of order in one's innermost being.<sup>5</sup>

Since the wisdom perspective also sees the individual as bound in a quite specific, highly dynamic, existential relationship with his or her environment,<sup>6</sup> we are challenged to navigate an exciting and difficult path through the world's chaos, in the knowledge that our inner order and harmony with God's creation will not only "get us by," but positively transform the world as we encounter it. We are challenged to live joyfully in the depth of the "now" without anxiety for the unknown of the future. The spirit of wisdom is found in the following story about a blacksmith traveling on a journey. He is a man of simplicity and an ordered soul, and a central metaphor for our enterprise.

There once was a blacksmith who was traveling along a country road, going from his home town to a neighboring town. He walked along, swinging his arms and whistling. A merchant approached from the opposite direction and, seeing the cheerful attitude of the smith, stopped him and asked, "Why are you so joyful and happy? Are you going to visit a good friend?"

"No," replied the smith. "I am a stranger where I am going."

"Well, then, are you going to collect a rich inheritance?" inquired the merchant.

"Ah, yes, I hope so eventually," said the smith, "but not one of money, as you suppose."

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<sup>5</sup>Gerhard Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 301.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

"Well, then," cried the merchant, exasperated, "where are you going in such a good mood?"

"I have set out on a journey, determined to enjoy each day as much as I can, but I have no idea how things may turn out."

"Well," gasped the merchant, "how can you be so cheerful when you don't even know where you are going?"

"Oh, but I do know where I am going. Today I am going to the next town to shoe a horse. And today's journey is part of a much larger journey. I am cheerful because I know who I am, where I have come from, and where I am going."<sup>7</sup>

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The first step towards creating a wisdom style of ministry is to nurture wisdom's understanding within oneself. One must engage in humble and disciplined self-reflection, in dedicated openness to one's God given future. One must hope and pray for the spirit of wisdom to make herself known. Space must be reserved within one's occupational pursuits for intuitive insights and imaginative creativity through such means as journal keeping; participation in the visual arts and music, awareness of non-verbal communication; discernment of feelings, relaxation, and silent meditation geared toward creative receptivity; awareness of relationships with parts of oneself, other persons and God. One must surround oneself with metaphors and symbols which nurture one's Christian "world image." What does this mean in practical terms of ministry?

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<sup>7</sup>Shelia Moriarty O'Fahey, et al. (eds.) What the Gospels Say About Jesus (Winona, MN: St. Mary's College Press, 1978), p. 3.

The work of Paul Watzlawick in the application of metaphoric mind communication to psychotherapy provides excellent guidelines for understanding the reciprocal dynamics of personal metaphoric images of life and world and one's ability to grow, adapt to change, and ultimately, promote positive change in the world about one.<sup>8</sup> Watzlawick explores the nature and language of the metaphoric mind in terms of the differing functions of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. Split brain theory, pioneered by Robert Ornstein,<sup>9</sup> assumes that the two hemispheres of the brain can be ideally integrated as a harmonious, synergistic relationship. The left brain functions in a rational, analytical fashion and the right brain performs metaphorical, synthesizing and holistic functions. Such terms make clear the contemporary challenge of wisdom at a cognitive level. To say that we once again "need" the personification of wisdom and her various mytho-logia is to say that we need her more feminine (Jung) or right brain (Ornstein) contributions to a religion and a culture which has clearly suffered from extreme masculine and left brain dominance. As the ancient sages of Israel drew from a "pool of Near Eastern wisdom in terms of

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Watzlawick, The Language of Change (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

<sup>9</sup>Robert Ornstein, The Psychology of Consciousness (New York: Penguin Books, 1972).

generalized, secular patterns of human response" (see p. 19 above), today's Christian wisdom seekers are able to draw from the work of secular humanists such as Ornstein, Watzlawick and Bob Samples.<sup>10</sup>

Like the ancient sages, we must seek to "balance" the Protestant emphasis on God as the Father (and Jesus as the Son) with the reintroduction of the feminine personification of wisdom as Sophia, nurturer of human life, who mediates in and through God's creation. To say that we once again "need" Sophia and her various mytho-logia is to say that we need her more feminine (Jung) or "right brain" contributions to a faith and a culture which have clearly suffered from extreme masculine and left brain dominance. However, our undertaking should not be considered psychologically pragmatic as much as theologically essential for the preservation of the New Testament insights into Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the wisdom of God--the unique and perfect example of the unity of language, belief, and life--even unto his death on the cross. Paul reminds us once again:

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and

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<sup>10</sup>Bob Samples, The Metaphoric Mind (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1976).



Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

( I Corinthians 1:21-25 )

Today, while fundamentalist Christians predict that the demise of the world in the clutches of "Satan" is at our doorstep, the simple wisdom styled teaching of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 16:1-4 tells us otherwise. When the Pharisees and Sadducees asked him to show them a sign from heaven--an apocalyptic sign that might indicate the dawn of messianic times, the date of the final warfare against Rome and its demonic allies, Jesus answered, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah." The book of Jonah, as a wisdom writing, points to God's infinite mercy for even the "worst evildoers" represented by the citizens of Ninevah, the capital of the hated Assyria. The world does not have to be destroyed for the kingdom to come. Indeed, the wisdom of the earth calls out to us to stop our irresponsible destruction of her resources and humankind, itself. The life, teaching, and crucifixion of the incarnate wisdom of God, Jesus Christ, shows us that the "way" is through the wisdom of simple living, and the power of creative suffering, given meaning within the matrix of a unique metaphorical, holistic consciousness which transcends time and persons.

The matter, then, is more than metaphor. It is a matter of the transcendent source of life, encountered

through the resurrected Jesus Christ, who as the wisdom of God, existed before the creation of all things and who abides with us now as the presence of God in the world known as the Holy Spirit or wisdom's Shekinah, in the language of post-Biblical Judaism.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it... And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

(John 1:1-5, 14)

Wisdom, then, is a matter of words. It is also a matter of the Spirit, the transcendent source of all life. The ancient sages informed us that it is also a matter of the stability and solidarity of families as well. Jesus promoted these qualities of filial relationship on the scale of the community of believers; and through his life and parables, clearly opened the door to the whole of humanity as an extended family of faith. In Luke 8:21, Jesus is quoted as saying, "My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it." Wisdom styled counseling, teaching, and preaching must, therefore, be rooted in the enrichment and promotion of the family unit and more specifically an extended "family" type unit of relationships. This points directly to resources in counseling such as Douglas Anderson's New Approaches to

Family Pastoral Care<sup>11</sup> (built on Watzlawick's theories); John Westerhoff's notion of Christian education through intergenerational socialization as set out in his book Will Our Children Have Faith,<sup>12</sup> and the dialogic preaching style promoted by Reuel Howe in his book Partners in Preaching.<sup>13</sup> These and other contemporary wisdom resources will be studied in the chapter that follows. Before moving ahead to these areas, several more introductory remarks need to be made about wisdom and its contemporary resources.

The ongoing enrichment of family and church life through the sharing together of fables, fairytales, myths, parables, proverbs, and allegories (classical and contemporary, Biblical and non-Biblical) educates the metaphoric mind and, at the same time, draws on its "timeless" and "unitive" qualities as they transcend differences in age, station, and nation.

Once the gift of the Spirit of wisdom is received, it must be sustained in a constant rhythm of "containing and yielding" against the push and pull of the more conventional historical tradition of our faith. The wisdom

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<sup>11</sup>Douglas Anderson, New Approaches to Family Pastoral Care (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>12</sup>John H. Westerhoff, III, Will Our Children Have Faith? (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

<sup>13</sup>Reuel L. Howe, Partners in Preaching (New York: Seabury Press, 1967).

styled minister, engaged in general parish ministry, therefore, should not assume to approach the "call forward" of the world merely through the more indirect or diffuse metaphorical means.

The lifestyle of Jesus and the Apostle Paul model wisdom's "in-world" mysticism. As Ben Sirach indicates, wisdom's scholar travels in foreign countries, he has experienced human good and human evil... He will grow upright in purpose and learning, he will ponder the Lord's hidden mysteries, he will display the instruction he has received, taking his pride in the Law of the Lord's covenant... (cf. p. 17).

In addition to being cognizant of left-brain analytical data about global situations such as world hunger, the arms race and political/social oppression, the wisdom seeker of human wholeness will try to live and encourage others to live in an ecologically sound, environmentally aware fashion. Hearing the voice of wisdom calling to us through "creation" means pursuing a simplified lifestyle--eating lower on the food chain, recycling reusable goods, conserving energy, and supporting the development of renewable energy resources (e.g. solar energy), and taking part in environmental action organizations. In the traditional eclectic spirit of the ancients, diverse faiths and philosophies of life which nurture awareness of belonging to the global family should

be encountered with openness and sharing.

Among ministers, models of such a lifestyle are particularly rare, but I would cite the life of Muriel Lester (1883-1965) as worthy of particular biographical note. Ms. Lester became an international preacher of peace with the Fellowship of Reconciliation after devoting several decades of her life to settlement house work in the East End of London. She was variously called the "walking mystic" by colleagues and "a hurricane with a halo" by friends. Her life united all the usual opposites in word and action and body and spirit. Her "patchwork" preaching style was filled to overflowing with parables, stories, and illustrations. Insight into her lifetime of struggle to maintain inner peace through meditation and prayer amidst extreme physical exertion in labor and travel is available to us through her numerous autobiographical works.<sup>14</sup>

As we search for our own life parallels and metaphors, such life models are vital. Their scarcity should encourage us to the metaphorical creativity known as autobiography.

The effectiveness of one's use of parables and metaphors in preaching, teaching, and counseling is largely

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<sup>14</sup>Muriel Lester, It Occurred to Me (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937); Muriel Lester, Kill or Cure (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1937); Muriel Lester, It So Happened (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947); Muriel Lester, Ways of Praying (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1937).

determined by the authenticity of one's personal, experienced participation in them. As we share the world image provided by the Christian wisdom experience, our own life ideally becomes a metaphor, as did Jesus' life, for the ultimate, ineffable dynamics of life itself. Obviously, this recognition calls us to extreme moral and artistic diligence in the pursuit of wisdom resources from all walks of life. Metaphors which transform our lives should be especially remembered and recorded in our own personal collection of wisdom. One such parable which has vitalized my own sense of call to the wisdom pursuit for fourteen years. Over this period of time, I have found myself re-copying and re-reading it many times...each time realizing more fully what it means. Its connection with wisdom's "creation mysticism" has been made clear to me only upon the writing of this paper, although I found my energy level to be extremely heightened by it upon first reading it in a high school literature class. The following parable is found in Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov. It occurs at the point of Brother Alyosha's decision to leave his monastery life and confront the world after having it "touch" him through the painful death of his spiritual mentor, Father Zossima. The narrative represents a "twice told story" with a prolonged moment, a "space" in the middle which invites the reader to make his or her own response, before Alyosha's response is seen. I

perceive it as portraying a moment of pure, worldly wisdom consciousness.

He did not stop on the steps either, but went quickly down; his soul, overflowing with rapture, yearned for freedom, space, openness. The vault of heaven, full of soft, shining stars, stretched vast and fathomless above him. The Milky Way ran in two pale streams from the zenith to the horizon. The fresh, motionless, still night enfolded the earth. The white towers and golden domes of the cathedral gleamed out against the sapphire sky. The gorgeous autumn flowers, in the beds round the house, were slumbering till morning. The silence of earth seemed to melt into the silence of the heavens. The mystery of earth was one with the mystery of the stars.

Alyosha stood, gazed, and suddenly threw himself down on the earth. He did not know why he embraced it. He could not have told why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss it all. But he kissed it weeping, sobbing and watering it with his tears, and vowed passionately to love it, to love it for ever and ever. "Water the earth with the tears of your joy and love those tears," echoed in his soul.<sup>15</sup>

#### PASTORAL COUNSELING RESOURCES

Depth psychology as it has developed from the work of Carl Jung;<sup>16</sup> Psychosynthesis as it has developed from the work of Roberto Assagioli;<sup>17</sup> Gestalt therapy, based on the work of Fritz Perls,<sup>18</sup> the Growth Counseling of Howard

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<sup>15</sup>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), p. 436.

<sup>16</sup>Carl Jung, The Symbolic Life (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950).

<sup>17</sup>Roberto Assagioli, Psychosynthesis (New York: Viking Press, 1965).

<sup>18</sup>Fritz Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim (Lafayette, CA: Real People Press, 1967).

Clinebell;<sup>19</sup> and the family pastoral care approach of Douglas Anderson<sup>20</sup> all provide significant and complementary practical tools for creating a wisdom style of pastoral counseling. However, these resources must be carefully gleaned according to the guidelines of the ancient wisdom tradition. As noted above, it is also important that one's use of wisdom resources correspond with one's own "authentic" life experience. The wisdom seeker can be highly eclectic, but must also be wary of "short-cuts" and simplifications which ignore the basic "Divine" ambiguities and subtle complexities. The roots of gnostic distortion and hubris lay close at hand within the "self-actualization" language of several contemporary wisdom resources. The basic wisdom truth remains that human beings cannot change themselves. The techniques described here represent disciplines not unlike those of the mystic saints who devoted themselves to humble receptivity of God's revelation. As Anderson phrases it, "In pastoral care change is not for the sake of change itself but for the increase of God-authored new and abundant life..."<sup>21</sup>

Depth psychology offers an especially theologically "grounded" approach to understanding the function of

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<sup>19</sup>Clinebell, Growth Counseling.

<sup>20</sup>Anderson.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 7.



metaphor and symbol within the human psyche. As illustrated earlier in this paper, the particular reversal of psychological processes brought about by a "successful" parable can be seen as providing an opportunity for furthering integration of the Self or personality. The "jolt" to one's psyche accomplished by the radical reversal of one's expectations "shakes loose" various alienated or repressed contents of what Jung calls the unconscious mind.

(Ornstein, et al., would possibly call the same process the calling into action of the commonly less dominant and neglected right brain, or "metaphoric mind".) The entire Self is transformed and transcended as projections are withdrawn and one's consciousness is expanded to include a more holistic world image.

Unfortunately, the therapeutic model of depth analysis has traditionally been authoritarian and "therapist-client" centered in a fashion which has not lent itself to adaption for use by ministers in congregations. However, recent work of pastoral counselors such as Clyde Reid at his "Center for New Beginnings" in Denver, Colorado, has opened up personal dream and myth exploration to the "wisdom" of small group sharing, insight and support.<sup>22</sup> To show how such an approach can work I would like to share

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<sup>22</sup> See Clyde Reid, The Return to Faith (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) and Clyde Reid, Groups Alive, Church Alive (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

something of my own life-changing dream work undertaken with Clyde Reid's guidance at a "Jung for the Pastoral Counselor" workshop held at the Center.

During the week-long workshop participants took turns sharing with the group a significant and as yet "unanalyzed" dream. Rather in the fashion of a Quaker meeting, persons responded with interpretative "wisdom" as they felt "moved" by the Spirit. Possible meanings of symbols were usually suggested in the form of a question which would draw the "dreamer" to view the dream from a new perspective. After the collective wisdom was offered, Clyde Reid would often suggest that the "dreamer" place herself or himself in the center of the circle, and after being guided through a relaxation exercise, attempt to revisualize and reenter the dream imagery on their "mental screen". Clyde Reid then modeled a non-authoritarian style facilitation of dream work which (I am convinced) could easily be taught to laypersons within a similar setting in a church.

I gained a life-changing understanding of a dream parable as follows: The group heard my narration of the dream sequence and observed a picture which I had drawn depicting the floorplan of an octagonal "apartment" through which I had walked in the dream. My dream had only taken me through the right sector of the floor plan, so the left side of the figure was blank. The "imbalance" of the image was quickly noted, along with its potential "mandala" (symbol of wholeness) quality. How detailed were the people and things which I could describe on the right half of the picture! After hearing various suggestions from the group I found myself wondering what and who I would find if I explored the "left" half of the dream imagery. After lying on the floor in the center of the circle of workshop participants, and relaxing for a few moments Reid guided me back into the dream. He persuaded me to pursue images in my mind's eye against which I felt much resistance.

I discovered that the left side of the apartment was quite empty except for a window with a tall pine tree outside. Asking me what I wanted to do with it, Reid enabled me to consider (and reject) the option of climbing out and away. Choosing to explore further, I was soon upset to find myself blocked by a white wall cutting off the upper left quadrant of the structure. Feeling the basic support of the attention of the group around me, and being told by Reid that he could provide me with any tools which I might need to proceed I chose

to break through the wall in spite of a certain fear of doing so. Conjuring up Reid's donation of a huge axe I chopped through the wall several times, only to find it closing over again. Encouraged to keep trying by Reid, I finally broke through and found complete darkness beyond.

I was overcome with a sense of futility, but struggled to see what might be there for me. What I found was most surprising...a fireplace glowing with warmth and an old woman slowly rocking in a chair drawn up to the hearth. Being told to speak to her by Reid, I moved closer and recognized my long-dead grandmother who had lived with my family when I was a child. She asked why I had come to see her, and my answer was totally surprising to me as a woman who had consciously chosen against marriage and family to pursue a call to the ministry. "I want to be a mother, and I need your help to show me how to do it right!" As she agreed to help me I broke into tears. The guided dream re-entry (active imagination) session ended with the group moving in around me and corporately lifting and rocking me in a human cradle of love.

I have followed the wisdom of my grandmother--wise old farm woman that she was--and I am happy now as a mother. My husband and I recently chose to cross the country to raise our young son in the rural midwest where we have been able to simplify our lifestyle and slow our pace of life. Having resumed my career as a minister only part-time, I enjoy having the freedom to leisurely rock my baby to sleep. His room has a large window and just outside, there stands a strangely familiar tall pine tree! Needless to say, I feel quite "balanced"!

Psychosynthesis institutes located throughout the country provide a similarly non-authoritarian approach to dream wisdom, and they offer especially helpful group techniques for "introjecting" parables, myths and other metaphorical images. In Psychosynthesis Assagioli outlines exercises for intra-group "spiritual" psychosynthesis based on the Legend of the Grail, Dante's Divine Comedy, and the Blossoming of the Rose.<sup>23</sup> Psychosynthesis represents a

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<sup>23</sup>Assagioli, pp. 207-216.

"pluridimensional" conception of the human personality, and spiritual psychosynthesis seeks the integration of all the components of the personality around the Higher Self, which rests at the "apex" of a Higher Unconscious or Superconscious which is the source of our "higher intuitions and inspirations--artistic, philosophical or scientific, ethical 'imperatives' and urges to humanitarian and heroic action. It is the source of the higher feelings, such as altruistic love; of genius, and of the states of contemplation, illumination, and ecstasy".<sup>24</sup>

Psychosynthesis offers a rather complicated, culturally sophisticated, and generally "high minded" approach to the riches of metaphorical communication. A similar but simpler technique originated by Ignatius of Loyola, is employed by Archie Matson in his manual for spiritual growth, based on the Gospel of Luke, entitled A Month with the Master.<sup>25</sup> It involves the telling of stories in a group in such a fashion that the hearers are enabled to choose a character in the story and identity closely with it. The storytelling takes place in such a pictorially descriptive way that they can imaginatively "live" through their character. Discussion of one's

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-19.

<sup>25</sup>Archie Matson, A Month with the Master (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958).

experience usually follows.

One can travel far afield into classical and contemporary literature as sources for wisdom insights, however, no resource is richer for the Christian tradition than the parables of Jesus. John Sanford's The Kingdom Within provides a Jungian interpretation of a number of Jesus' parables in a fashion which is suitable for study in a small group.<sup>26</sup>

The Gestalt school of therapy captures the wisdom emphasis on the "now" in terms of dream work and guided fantasy, however, it does not address itself to the metaphorical literary tradition as do depth psychology and psychosynthesis. Since it lacks the transcendent dimension provided by the other schools of thought surveyed here, I will not pursue its approach any further except to say that it offers helpful non-authoritarian methods for both self-therapy and group theory.

Douglas Anderson combines insights from a number of the above schools of thought as he explores the multiple dimensions of the Biblical conception of "word". He specifies four dimensions of "word" which address the metaphoric mind and enable it to transform images and lives: imagistic, metaphorical words; visual experiences; actions or events; and imperatives. Building on Watzlwick's notion

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<sup>26</sup>John Sanford, The Kingdom Within (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1970). See also John Sanford, Healing and Wholeness (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

that the right brain serves to synthesize each person's experience into a holistic metaphor or "world image" which is unique and vital to that person, Anderson claims that "family metaphors" are also created. The world images of the two spouses who form the family interact to give direction and meaning to the family's development. At times they may also block its development and require change through metaphoric communication.<sup>27</sup> Anderson suggests eight techniques of metaphoric communication for family enrichment and counseling: active imagination, story/parable/dream, reframing, special language patterns, creative memory, action imperatives, affirmations, and play.<sup>28</sup> Anderson's approach blends so closely with the approach of this paper that most of his concepts have already been explored in this paper. However, Anderson adds to our wisdom understanding the use of the term "reframing" (taken from Watzlwick) for describing the process of shifting the way a problem is approached so that it is viewed from an entirely different perspective. This can occur through the reversal of expectations referred to previously in the context of parables, or in the context of making more "simple" paradoxical remarks in a counseling session. Anderson applies the term to Jesus' ministry on

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<sup>27</sup>Anderson, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

earth as "a radical reframing of our human expectation."<sup>29</sup> Among the special language patterns which "sneak" into the metaphoric mind with little resistance Anderson includes not only aphorisms, but condensations, puns, jokes, homonyms, allusions, quotations, and non-sepcific (generalized) words and phrases. Anderson's use of the concept of creative memory is also new to our wisdom "vocabulary". It has to do with the nature of linguistic labels for certain organizations of experience stored in the metaphoric mind. "When members of a family state a goal they desire, such as "to be loving," the pastor needs to ask them what the experience would be like if that goal were achieved. He may then ask them for a name for that experience or for names for the part of each person that would be acting in that experience, such as "loving friends." The pastor can then ask family members to describe in detail one or more instances in which that experienced occurred... As the family members are describing both the desired future and remembered past experiences, they are automatically utilizing their own internal resources for creating that experience right in the present moment, Anderson explains.<sup>30</sup> The notion of action imperatives (terse instructions or commands for

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

action) as "image-challenging", Anderson traces back to Jesus' "world image" shattering directives such as that given to the right young ruler: "You lack one thing. Go, sell what you have and give to the poor,... and come, follow me." Anderson's last two techniques are "common sense" applications of principles to adults and children alike. As children and as adults, we respond better to challenges when they are given to us in positive wording --affirmations. "The little engine that could" remains in my mind as a significant metaphor for this mode of approach coming from within and addressing ourselves. ("I think I can, I think I can...") Play, both unstructured and structured, promotes use of the imagination, and rapid learning through the carefree integration of body, mind and spirit.<sup>31</sup> Anderson's approach also represents wisdom's sensitivity to the timeliness of various metaphors and actions. He sets his concept of changing world image within the process of a seven stage family life cycle.

If one regards the community of believers as an extension of familial type relationships, then one can see Anderson's eight techniques for metaphoric communication being undertaken in a variety of formal and informal counseling situations. A holistic approach to pastoral counseling nurtures family, marriage and individual growth

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 38.



in an ongoing program of metaphoric enrichment and "crisis prevention."

Because of the cultural repression and neglect of the wisdom of the metaphoric mind, the task will not be easy. As Anderson recognizes, it will mean broadening the program of the church to include various visual and auditory symbolic and metaphorical forms which express the "wordless word." The free-flowing metaphoric minds of children should be given the lead in therapeutic intergenerational "play" and storytelling. The significance of Jesus' relationship with children is highlighted in such an approach to ministry. Indeed, the boundless energy and imaginative creativity of childhood should provide inspiration for an enterprise which, in left brain or analytical terms, will require an enormous "overhaul" of the definition of pastoral care, Christian education, and preaching. We need only to remember wisdom's holistic and synergistic view of human participation in the positive growth dynamics of God's creation, and turn to the prerequisite task of our own spiritual growth work. Howard Clinebell captures the "zest" of the wisdom, metaphoric perspective in the following statement:

The heart of spiritual growth is opening oneself more fully to the vital energy which is the creative Spirit of the universe. Opening one's life to this spiritual energy helps fill one's inner being with warmth and zest for using well the gift of each day. The most common barriers to increased spiritual vitality are the hard inner lumps of absolute beliefs, unfaced doubts, and false absolutes, the shoddy gods we

unwittingly worship. Eliminating these log-jams in one's inner stream allows the spiritual energies of the universe to flow again... There are a variety of spiritual disciplines that can help people develop a more open, dynamic relationship with God's enlivening Spirit. Meditation and meditative imaging, in my experience, are the most valuable of these disciplines. Used together, they can help meet several spiritual needs, in addition to deepening our relationship with God. They can strengthen our awareness of our aloneness in the whole creation, provide nurture for one's higher Self, and open one to peak experiences.<sup>31</sup>

Growth counseling regards spiritual growth as the integrating core of all human growth and it focuses on awareness, decision, and commitment. Like the teachings of Jesus and the sages, Growth Counseling assumes a "background" context of a caring and open community. Training and motivating people to facilitate or enable a network of mutual metaphorical nurture and personal growth is central to the contemporary wisdom enterprise. Spiritual and personal growth groups in churches offer a unique opportunity for the integration of wisdom "consciousness raising" into the life of the church. These groups can use certain of the techniques and approaches outlined above.

The average Christian sharing and support group, though it involves education in creative listening and communicating, does not offer the basic understanding of the dynamic of metaphor and parable necessary to spiritual growth. In order to impact the six dimensions of relationship across which Growth Counseling seeks to strengthen

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<sup>32</sup>Clinebell, Growth Counseling, p. 128.

communication, I contend that we must look beyond therapeutic models to a total redefinition of the church community on the basis of metaphorical consciousness. With Clinebell, I call for churches to be "human wholeness centers". The nurturing of growth in wisdom understanding calls for personal relationships in corporate (small group) and individual (one-to-one) ongoing community settings in which beliefs are expressed with such metaphorical power and conviction that judgments and confrontations of persons can be made in the way that is unique to God's wisdom. Decisions of commitment of individuals are called for, but room for freedom of decision, through acceptance and caring (and the basic metaphorical structure itself) is concurrently given. The means and methods of ministry, which must emanate from a "human wholeness center" must go hand in hand with community-socialization education and participation in social and political action groups. One of the disciplines essential to wisdom is to learn to be open to the world and behold the future in its embryonic forms in the present moment. Before moving on to resources for Christian education, I would like to take the time to go into one contemporary resource in this regard. It comes from the depth psychological school of thought and it is called "synchronicity".

I contend that the concept of "synchronicity" closely approximates the ancient wisdom concept of

"timeliness". It reflects the basic wisdom assumption that every moment and event in one's life is personal and appropriate. For Jungians, as for the wisdom sages, God's creation is very much turned toward persons. It often addresses and guides them in an acausal fashion. There are coincidences of events in time and space which seem to co-occur meaningfully. Their relationship reflects something more than chance.

The more one disciplines oneself to listen to that "still small voice" of one's intuitive metaphoric mind, the more one becomes a part of occasions of synchronicity. Synchronicity is the stuff of which the legends of the Red Sea and the Star of Bethlehem are made. Synchronicity is the means by which great minds and hearts meet. I concur with Ira Progoff who says that "synchronicity can become a master key for opening the door to teachings regarding the nature of human destiny that have heretofore been closed to us."<sup>33</sup>

Synchronicity reflects wisdom's truth that there is a continuity between the order and balance in one's innermost being and the orders and harmony of creation. With increased understanding of the interactive and constructive nature of synergistic, right and left brain, activity, consciousness can be expanded in many ways. Today, one can

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<sup>33</sup> Ira Progoff, Jung, Synchronicity, and Human Destiny (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 15.

expand one's wisdom to include the subtle effects of internal and external biological and astral rhythms, of minute geophysical forces of the earth in its light-dark cycle, and even microclimactic conditions such as the ionization of the air. With the help of various meditation techniques and various instruments such as biofeedback, the average Christian can sensitize himself or herself to the subtle relationships of body, mind, spirit, and the external environment to a degree previously available only to a few saints and mystics.

Sensitivity to synchronicity, particularly in terms of relationships with others, can open one's life to seemingly "miraculous" wisdom resources such as cognition through dreams, foreknowledge, answered prayers, healings through faith, and "saving" presences (at the scene of misfortunes), etc. Jungians, however, approach these phenomena much like the sages of old. Discernment of timeliness is a sober matter of spiritual discipline which is to be cultivated through intensive self-reflection, through inner-personal relationships (the relationship of one's Self to its component parts), and one's interpersonal relationships.

In closing, it must be reiterated that for the Christian pastoral counselor the lasting healing power of wisdom comes not from mastery of techniques or skills but from the enlivening power of participation in the Spirit--

the living parable of Jesus Christ. The subtle exchanges of "energies of belief" occur as blessings which are trans-personal as well as inter-personal. All the meditation, psychological self-mastery and metaphoric perceptions that can be achieved have no redeeming value apart from the radical power of language, belief, and life practice as they are united in the wisdom of God--Jesus Christ.

#### RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

According to George B. Leonard, Arnold Toynbee traced the disintegration with the Chinese Empire and the Roman Empire, in part, to book learning being divorced from a "spontaneous apprenticeship for life." "In fact," says he, "the art of playing with words was substituted for the art of living."<sup>34</sup> One suspects that a similar phenomenon occurred within the wisdom schools of Israel to the extent that when Jesus began to teach "the art of living" he found no place in a classroom. Is the situation occurring in our church schools today?

In a radical critique of the schooling-instruction understanding of education, John Westerhoff suggests that the only way our children will have faith is "by broadening the context of Christian education to include every aspect of our individual and corporate lives within an intentional,

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<sup>34</sup>George B. Leonard, Education and Ecstasy (New York: Dell, 1968), p. 11.

covenanting, pilgrim, radical, counter-cultural, tradition-bearing faith community."<sup>35</sup> This approach would seem to be fairly congruent with that of the wisdom tradition. If wisdom is to be rediscovered through Christian education, we must follow Westerhoff's advice that "no longer is it helpful or wise to emphasize schools, teachers, pupils, curricula, classrooms, equipment, and supplies."<sup>36</sup> Both educational and pastoral counseling opportunities can potentially be united in the development of new "rites of community" which will symbolically enrich persons in life crises, and unite persons in life transitions.

As mentioned previously, the wisdom tradition was closely associated with Israelite values of community and family solidarity. The foundation for such solidarity was and is to be found in the ongoing events of the community of faith. Westerhoff's community-enculturation model of education suggests the wisdom truth that learning begins in the most common human activities, and the nurturing of personal relationships therein. Westerhoff contends that, "persons learn first through their experience, then by imagining (stories), and last of all through the use of signs (conceptual language)."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Westerhoff, p. 49.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

For Christians, no matter what the setting, teaching is the exchange of wisdom through participation in the unique unity of language; faith, and life found in the living parable of Jesus Christ. This is essentially an "ecstatic" experience. When Leonard asserts that education, at best, is "ecstatic" he uses the term ecstasy to mean deep delight and joy. But the definition must be expanded within the Christian context to include the original Greek definition of ekstasis. In Christian education one is literally "put out of one's place." One is moved. One stands in the place of another at the same time that another shares where you stand. Whether this phenomenon is viewed from the side of the workings of metaphoric mind or from the side of the spiritual presence of God in relationships, this ecstasy is characteristic of participation in the parable of Jesus Christ.

Wayne Rood expresses this spirit of wisdom:

In nurturing Christians, teaching is a soul-making thing to do. It shakes one up. It takes one's breath away and gives it back clean and fresh. It demands never-ending makeup work. It is the beginning of the world. It begins in the most common human activity. Whether it is more original than the solitary struggle for survival is a matter of debate, but it probably is. At any rate, it is universal: giving-and-receiving...

In nurturing Christians, teaching and learning is the common activity of giving and receiving raised to intentionality, conducted with sensitivity, and completed by an action in kind.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Wayne Rood, On Nurturing Christians (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), pp. 60, 67.



The writings of Westerhoff and Rood provide excellent resources for the practical, developmental needs of creating a wisdom style of education. They challenge the church to a far broader view of teaching and learning than is common in the traditional schooling-instructional model.

Rood particularly designates the nurture of "personhood" as the "special business" of Christian educators over and against the task of general public education. He says that in their independent stance, Christian educators might find themselves "cutting right across" the ways in which general education seems to be responding to the "stirrings" going on in the world:

Public school people tend to go with the linear logic in which they were trained to think as educators; their modes of thinking about solutions to educational problems tend to be linear if for no other reason than that the problems are almost always defined in linear terms. (But) ... only post-Reformation religion rode on the printed book, ... both Christianity and Judaism sprang out of pre-linear experience.<sup>39</sup>

As mentioned earlier, wisdom is a learning of "kairos" time (non-linear), not chronos (linear) time. How does one educate for "kairos" awareness? Westerhoff more explicitly addresses the situation which he speaks of the need for the development of both the intellectual and the intuitive modes of understanding in Christian education. In this regard he stresses the need for Christian education

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56.

to help persons recover "the God-given ability to wonder and create, to dream and fantasize; imagine and envision; to sing, paint, dance, and act, ... to appreciate the new, the marvelous, the mysterious; a sensual and a kinesthetic awareness."<sup>40</sup> Westerhoff goes on to say the following:

Moses' intuitive experience with the burning bush led him to reflect on his life and bring to his people a vision and a message of liberation. The intuitive awareness of Christ's presence in the breaking of the bread at Emmaus led the disciples to lives of radical apostleship. None of these experiences or their resulting acts were purely rational or intuitive. Each represents a worldly intuitive experience which, through the use of the intellect, led to new sorts of moral behavior.<sup>41</sup>

Symbols and metaphors remain the essential mediators between "passive" intuitions of the metaphoric mind and active intellectual conceptualizations of the analytical mind. Education in the wisdom tradition not only involves the use of metaphorical forms of communication which enrich the activity of the right brain, imagination, but the exercise and development of the integration of our "two minds" or hemispheres of the brain. This constructive use of our full mental capabilities is that which allows us to see beyond ourselves--to have empathy--and to actually move out from ourselves in concrete encounters with the world. Only through this can we live in the hope of reconciliation of the whole of creation.

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<sup>40</sup>Westerhoff, p. 73.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

Through exposure to a wide variety of ancient Wisdom resources and the plethora of classical and contemporary poetry, fables, aphorisms, proverbs, allegories, riddles, parables and poetic prose, adults and children alike cannot help but find themselves perceiving life's realities more expansively. Inasmuch as the way of wisdom education today must include a broadening of the educational context to include every aspect of our individual and corporate lives within a faith community, we must encourage education through various imaginative liturgical and doxological modes such as dance, music, and art.

Christian education, conceived in the style of the wisdom tradition, must drive us into ourselves, that we may be taken beyond ourselves to participate generously in the order of creation as it has been revealed to us in the parable of Jesus Christ. The spirit of wisdom's mode of education, through "spontaneous apprenticeship of life" --through community enculturation--is summarized keenly in the following statement by Wolfhart Pannenberg:

Left to ourselves, given up to our ego, we would have to smother in indolence or in arrogance, to consume ourselves in greed, envy, avarice, and hatred, to sink into anxiety and despair. It seldom comes to that, because we are repeatedly torn out beyond our ego by life. This includes the external circumstances to which we must adjust, the necessity of entrusting ourselves where we cannot secure ourselves, the objectivity of rational knowledge, and the creative power of imagination and love. All these things tear us out beyond our ego from time to time. We ourselves are not

capable of coming beyond ourselves. However, the manifold reality that impinges on us opens life up for us again and again. God himself, who deals with us through all things, leads us beyond our ego along the road to our destiny...

In the moments that lift us above our selves, we sense that we are still under way toward another goal. How the life of the individual may emerge from the contradiction that fills it in order to stand as a whole before God's eyes is something that no one can know.<sup>42</sup>

#### RESOURCES FOR PREACHING

Albert Einstein once jokingly explained, "When you sit with a nice girl for two hours, it seems like two minutes; when you sit on a hot stove for two minutes, it seems like two hours. That's Relativity."<sup>43</sup>

One's experience of the intersection of metaphorical, parabolic time with historical, linear time calls up awareness similar to that expressed by Einstein. It is like an ephemeral dream filled with images which simultaneously please and disturb. A twenty minute sermon may seem as if it is "five minutes" and the warmth of the communion wine may seem to last "forever." Such is the experience of the presence of God in the Word made flesh. Participation in this parable-incarnation of Jesus Christ is catalyzed by the use of metaphoric imagery. It evokes the reality of the presence as it talks about the presence. It transforms time, space and souls.

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<sup>42</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, What is Man? (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 65-67.

<sup>43</sup>Ornstein, p. 100.

The minister who seeks wisdom resources for preaching must learn "inner" as well as "outer" listening. She or he must be aware of subtle alterations of consciousness which transpire when he or she experiences (or creates) indirect, metaphorical modes of communication. The presence of these variations is the "test" for true parabolic communication. They signal the participation of the hearer ineffable truths of wisdom. Such changes cannot be manipulated. They can only be given "space". This participation is characterized by openness, trust, and willingness to relate to various aspects of one's self, others and the world in the awareness of the unity of all life. The spoken and written word, as it is customarily used today by mass media, bludgeons the subtleties of human consciousness. By contrast, parabolic expression offers a much needed freedom for response. One runs the risk that it will not be appreciated, but one must persist. One must trust in the stirrings of the wisdom mode of understanding.

My experience indicates that true parabolic communication is never really "lost", especially on the ears of children.

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will (Matthew 11:25-26, RSV).

If one has preached a true parable, in language which is simple and familiar enough, one will have trouble containing the imaginative responses of children. The Parable of the

Balloon is one among many contemporary parable resources in which one can actively use a symbolic "prop" (a balloon) in addition to words, to augment the central metaphor.

### The Parable of the Balloon<sup>44</sup>

When Jesus taught, he often spoke in parables. When he spoke with farmers, he talked about crops; when he talked with shepherds, he spoke of sheep. Today he might speak to us about the parable of the skyscrapers, the freeways, or even balloons.

Did you ever try to play catch with a balloon? It doesn't work. We can't control where the balloon goes, or who receives it, or the wind that carries it.

Everyone was happy at the birthday party except one little boy. He had all the usual problems that shy little guys have. He wanted to have fun just like everybody else, but something inside him just always got all tied up. He could never really bring himself to reach out to the others, so even the times that should have been the happiest were lonely times for him. He wanted to reach out and be a part of things, but he just didn't know how.

One of the other boys picked up a balloon and tapped it to one of his friends. But balloons don't always go where they are tapped. The wind took the balloon on its way until it touched the shoulder of the shy, frightened guy. He didn't know that the balloon wasn't meant for him, and for the first time in his life he felt like he was part of the party, and he really thought that someone had tapped the balloon to him. He took the balloon and with great excitement he tapped it back. Soon he was playing with the others. A balloon that wasn't really meant for him somehow meant so very much to him.

God's blessings are like that, and we have the power to bring God's blessings to others. Sometimes the blessing we tap to a friend never gets there, and he never knows we sent it, and yet by the wind of the Spirit, God may send our blessings to someone we didn't even know was there.

Marilee Zdenek and Marge Champion provide a number

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<sup>44</sup>Exerpted from Marilee Zdenek and Marge Champion Catch in the Wind (Wacos, TX: Word Books, 1972), p. 32.

resources for a Wisdom style of ministry.<sup>45</sup> They are among the first of a generation of dancing ministers, who have embodied parabolic wisdom in liturgical movement, banner crafting, song, and prayer. Robert Ornstein stresses the importance of body movement, music, special sounds, and crafts, as well as stories which function as word-pictures for the "education of intuition and imagination as vital wisdom components."<sup>46</sup>

Once again, the level of unity, language, belief and life is a central issue. No words, movements or symbolic forms must be haphazardly wasted. Wisdom creativity is an art form. The appeal is aesthetic and not emotional. In this age of "McLuhanism" one must remember that the medium is not the whole message. The danger of iconography is always near.

Gifts such as dramatic storytelling, dance, music, and metaphorical artistic creativity are obviously not often found in one person. As stated earlier, the richness of a wisdom style of ministry will be found in its lay ministry implications in counseling, education, and preaching. Reuel Howe, stresses the value of preaching dialogically. He points to the wealth of living parables within the lives of church members, and he encourages

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ornstein, p. 180.

ministers to intentionally draw upon them in sermons (anonymously, but with the permission of the persons involved). Howe suggests that dialogical preaching demands instructing laity on their role, and the development of sermon study and feedback groups.<sup>47</sup>

In the creation of a wisdom style of ministry, animated "living" parables are not necessarily recommended to be used to the exclusion of other allegories, fables, parables, illustrations, narratives or proverbs. Ancient resources provide models which should not be forgotten. For instance Jotham's Fable (Judges 9:7-15) and Jehoshaphat's Fable (II Kings 14:9) offer examples of short stories in which non-human characters are pictured with human traits. Gordon C. Bennett offers one of the few available ready-made collections of contemporary Wisdom style resources in his Happy Tales, Fables and Plays.<sup>48</sup>

A contemporary parabler who offers much inspiration for creating parables is Flannery O'Connor.<sup>49</sup> O'Connor's parables are "radical" figurative representations of contemporary realities of life which the average churchgoer might wish to deny or avoid. The "new" context of old

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<sup>47</sup> Howe, p. 76.

<sup>48</sup> Gordon C. Bennett, Happy Tales, Fables and Plays (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1971).

<sup>49</sup> Flannery O'Connor, The Complete Stories (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971).



truths must be radical, for we live in a world where Christians must take radical risks and responsibilities. We must be thoroughly "shaken" to awake from the "deep sleep to which we have allowed ourselves to succumb. Slightly more ponderous, but definitely rich with contemporary metaphors, we find the poetry of Wallace Stevens.<sup>50</sup>

Barefoot Days of the Soul by Maxie Dunham is one of many devotional books which are rich resources for parables, fables, and poetic images. Dunham cites a warning which is valid for a wisdom style of ministry. "Don't kill the symbol by analysis, on the other hand don't freeze it. As a Zen master once stated it, we fix our gaze upon a finger pointing to the moon and never see the moon."<sup>51</sup> Jung is quoted as having given a similar warning about dream interpretation, "Learn as much as you can about symbolism: then forget it all when you are analyzing a dream"<sup>52</sup>

An additional word of caution must be added about the use of both "traditional" and contemporary resources. As we have said before, the main power of the wisdom style of ministry lies in its incarnational authenticity. Autobiographical stories and personal identification with

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<sup>50</sup>Wallace Stevens, The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967). See especially "Sunday Morning," p. 66-70.

<sup>51</sup>Maxie Dunham, Barefoot Days of the Soul (Waco, TX: Word Book, 1975), p. 9.

<sup>52</sup>Carl Gustav Jung, Man and His Symbols (London: Aldus Books, 1964), p. 56.

metaphors and parables are vitally important. The search for myths and biographies of persons who reflect the contemporary workings of the way of wisdom must continue. As Jungian Irene Claremont de Castillejo notes in her book entitled Knowing Woman, new hero and heroine models are important. The wisdom hero or heroine is one who can "hold fast to their own individual intuitive gifts, at the same time as they keep their feet on the ground of reality...a spiritual achievement of unique service to mankind."<sup>53</sup> Wisdom "role models" are "centered" persons who can hold opposites together in a creative tension within them. Castillejo suggests that such persons are to be found among artists, poets, musicians and painters. However, Castillejo also asserts, "There are some who have not recognized artistic form to serve this purpose. They are artists of living. To my mind these are the supreme heroes in our soulless society."<sup>54</sup> I concur with Castillejo and I seek such heroes.

Allan Hunter<sup>55</sup> and Howard Thurman<sup>56</sup> are two contemporary "artists of living" with whom I have had the good

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<sup>53</sup>Irene Claremont de Castillejo, Knowing Woman (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 38.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>55</sup>Allan Hunter, Courage in Both Hands (Los Angeles: New Century Foundation Press, 196-).

<sup>56</sup>Howard Thurman, Disciplines of the Spirit (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

fortune to be acquainted. In a presentation before the Disciplined Order of Christ (July, 1976), Howard Thurman told a parable in which I participated and in which I continue to participate with great enthusiasm. I have decided to include it in this paper as a three minute guided fantasy-parable in the context of a sermon I delivered at Saguaro Christian Church in Tucson, Arizona (January, 1977) on "The Way of Wisdom." The sermon represents an example of integration of a wisdom style of communication into a sermon context. It is in the spirit of wisdom--the spirit of the unity of language, belief and life--that I conclude this paper with a sermon of my own which summarizes and illustrates my guidelines for creating a wisdom style of ministry.

#### A SERMON

#### THE WAY OF WISDOM

Luke 11:49-54  
Mark 6:1-4

Last summer I had the pleasure of hearing Dr. Howard Thurman, a black scholar-mystic, give a series of speeches at a retreat of the Disciplined Order of Christ. I found his style of speaking (and his writings) to be a magnificent contemporary example of that which I call "the way of wisdom." I would like to share with you a parable of his which embedded itself deeply in my soul. As with

all storytelling from memory, the embellishments of the basic event are my own.

Allow me now, if you will, to take you on a brief journey into Howard Thurman's childhood and into the life of the child which is within each of you now. Please close your eyes and take a few moments to conjure up on the screen of your imagination...a picture of yourself at 10-11 years of age. While you are doing so, relax your body. Take a moment to check for tension spots, and if you need to, shift your position in your chair to get comfortable. Put yourself in the Mid-west or the south on an easy-going summer afternoon. You are walking alone along a thickly-wooded, dirt path, happily swinging a small tin bucket. The sun is brightly streaming through the green canopy above. The air is hanging rather heavily with moisture, but you don't notice it because you are busily scanning the dense underbrush for a thicket containing rich red patches of delicious ripe berries. Spotting the inviting crimson to your left off the side of the path, you are blind to all else. You fairly fly through the trees. You can taste the sweet juices in your mouth already. What delight: Caught up in the thrill of discovery, the reds and greens begin to blurr before your eyes. You plunge deeper into the brush, oblivious to the ominous hush of the beasts and the birds in the forest which surrounds you. At last, with mouth and fingers sore and sticky, bucket

long-ago overflowing, and stomach bulging uncomfortably; you straighten up from the search.

All is dark. All is still. Storm clouds have gathered across the sky and, the path is nowhere to be seen. As the first few splashes of rain begin to fall, you are faced with a decision. You have no idea which way to go. Should you plunge ahead in the murky grey, hoping to chance upon the path? You wonder. You might get even further lost... You could wait for the storm to pass, but you have lost all sense of time and you fear that nightfall might also be close on your heels. It might get even darker. In the midst of your fearful ponderings, lightning sears through the clouds in the distance, and a clap of thunder rolls quickly after. The storm is approaching swiftly. What will you do? Make your decision and follow it through in your fantasy. Open your eyes when you have finished your fantasy and you are either back on the path or hopelessly lost.

(Pause)

Howard Thurman chose to wait...right where he was. He held his breath and hoped. But he wasn't hoping for the storm to pass. He was hoping for another flash of lightning! In readiness for it he peered intently into the darkness. He counted on the flash of illumination to inform his senses of where he was, and where he had to go. As he tells it, it took several flashes during which he

looked in different directions before he got his bearings. When he finally set out, most of his journey was in total darkness, but he found his way home safely before the blackness about him poured heavily down.

The Way of Wisdom: Perceiving the inexpressible.

Sh-h-h... "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalms 17)

The Way of Wisdom: Openness to the world. Awareness of trustworthy patterns of relationship in and between God's creation and our individual lives. The Way of Wisdom: Attention to the darkness. Opening oneself to the unknown in anticipation of illumination.

The way of wisdom is described thusly in Proverbs 8: "On the heights beside the way, in the paths she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud:... O simple ones, learn prudence; O foolish men, pay attention. Hear, for I will speak noble things... Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold... I have counsel and sound wisdom, I have insight, I have strength... I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me... I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice... The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth... Before the mountains had been shaped... When he established the

heavens I was there... When he made firm the skies...when he assigned to the sea its limit... When he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him...and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always... Happy is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord; but he who misses me injures himself. All who hate me love death."

This is one of the great invitations to us by the wisdom of God's creation. Here it is personified as a woman, often known by the name of Sophia. Many of you are familiar with her presence throughout the collection of teachings which we know as Proverbs. Her Spirit is also predominant in the Book of Job, Ecclesiastes, and in many of the Psalms. The figure of Wisdom is also to be found in the books of the Wisdom of Solomon and Ben Sirach (which are included in the Catholic canon). Throughout the Old Testament she is seen as a mediating agent between God and his creation; and between humankind and the meaning of creation. We don't hear too much about her today, even though in the newest developments of physiological psychology and depth psychology are still raising the same questions which she answered thousands of years ago for the Hebrew authors. Why did we quit hearing her answers? Why did her answers become meaningless? I say that it is because we ceased to speak her language. When I say

we...I mean the Christian church (from all but its earliest days).

What is the language of wisdom? It is more than just wise sayings. It is the rich use of poetry, fables, fairytales, oracles, mystic visions, aphorisms, proverbs, hymns, dialogue sermons, guided fantasies (like the one you just went on), dream interpretation (and other artistic forms of liturgical embellishment), liturgical dance, allegories, riddles and most of all, parables. The language of wisdom is characterized by vivid metaphors and rhythms which are often combined in a sense of movement between parallel or binary constructions. If this is the language of a special form of understanding...then it is to be found scattered throughout both the Old and the New Testaments as well as in Egyptian, Babylonian and Assyrian literature. It is also to be found in many of the Far Eastern traditions, and especially in Zen.

But, where is the Wisdom of Sophia in the Western church? On the Roman Catholic scene, much of her motherly feminine nature has been kept alive in the worship of Mary, Mother of Jesus. The rich symbolical heritage of the Roman Catholic church has been given growth and vigor in recent years in the Episcopal church. The Protestant church, however, suffers greatly from the loss of Wisdom's language and her feminine images. I do not approach this fact as a feminist, but as student of the psychology of religion.



It is into the fields of depth psychology; para-psychology and radical religious sects that most of those who truly seek this form of God's wisdom have gone. Few Christians have been able to tread the middle road of maintaining an active ministry in the church while devoting their efforts as well to the pursuit of the Wisdom of which I speak. Wisdom seekers are found in the rather elitist schools of psychological thought such as those of C.G. Jung, or Robert Assigioli; and in various "schools" of spiritual illumination which demonstrate "non-rational" behavior in terms of radical pacifism, Sufi meditation, mass "faith" healings, and "mystical" visions and intuitions.

It is my goal of ministry to bring the richness of God's wisdom...of Sophia...with me into my ministry in the Disciples Church. I believe that women inherently know more of this style than men, and I challenge each Christian woman here to take up this call. I believe that the future of the Protestant church depends upon it. But hear me correctly, I am no doomsday prophet. I am a Wisdom advocate, and hence, I have the greatest trust and hope in the Divine power behind the new order of things which is bringing women into the ministry in great numbers.

My plea and my hope comes from personal experience of the above named non-rational forms of religious experience, as well as the two psychological schools of thought which I mentioned earlier, have been a vital part

of the development of my faith and ministry. In the past I have spoken of my experiences in the context of the contemporary challenge of mysticism. But the way of wisdom to which I am dedicated today includes much more than just the ecstatic devotions propounded by traditional mystics such as Evelyn Underhill, or Katheryn Kuhlman or Oral Roberts. The way of wisdom is the practical, world-outreaching mysticism of women such as Muriel Lester of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, of Alan Hunter of the Disciplined Order of Christ reknown, our own Ronald Osborn who has worked so long and hard with the Council on Christian Unity, Howard Thurman, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

I am convinced that it is not that difficult to achieve note among the ranks of mystic saints. The real honor comes to those who gain the stature of wise persons. They are mystics of sorts, but they are practical mystics par excellence. Jesus was just that--a practical mystic. Jesus ministry and particularly his death on the Cross, was characterized by what I call "receptive creativity." But his life and resurrection was also radically world affirming and active. These two aspects of His style of ministry came together precisely in his use of parables and symbols, and in his actual incarnation of the aspects. He was seen in fact as an embodiment of the pre-existent Wisdom of God's creation. It is no coincidence that the prologue to the Gospel of John echoes the phrases of Proverbs 8 which I read

earlier. In fact, Jesus is specifically referred to as a messenger of Wisdom in the Passages from Luke and Mark which were read earlier. It was because of his Wisdom message that he was crucified. It was his Wisdom style which so irritated the Pharisees and Scribes.

It is God's purpose that the humble riches of the Wisdom tradition should be kept as a companion to the saving history of the great prophets and kings, just as Sophia was by the side of Yahweh at the creation. Jesus Christ not only represented both traditions, but he embodied both Spirits--the Spirit of the Logos: the soaring faith of forward moving history, of rational, linear thought, and the Spirit of Wisdom, the depth probing faith of mythological imagery, of the non-rational, spatial perceptions. Only through both ways of faith, working in perfect harmony with each other did Jesus exhibit the power to die as he did on the cross and the power to live again as he did in the Resurrection. So too must we nurture both ways of faith. Today, for me at least, the way of Wisdom offers the greatest challenge because we have crucified it over and over again in the life of the church.

It is Wisdom speaking through Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30. He extends to us once again the invitation of Wisdom which was extended to the Hebrews through the author of Proverbs:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy

laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls,... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

## CONCLUSION

Wisdom tells us that there is a dynamic interrelationship between the inner realities of the human soul and the forces of the natural world. The current global instability reflects a disintegration of the human capacity to empathetically perceive and relate to the vast complexity of socio-economic, cultural and political dynamics which are at work in the world today. The linear, abstract and logical mode of knowing predominantly taught in places of work, worship and learning is inadequate to grasp the situation. In short, the situation is incomprehensible. The salvation history tradition, upon which the church has drawn almost exclusively in the past decade, does not provide adequate inspiration today because it is largely a product of the predominant masculine, left brain mode of knowing described above.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition also offers an alternative mode of known, which holistically compliments and completes the more predominant mode of knowing. This special kind of understanding is to be found in the neglected resources of the wisdom tradition. Through

wisdom's metaphorical understanding, as it unites language, belief and life, we need not be overwhelmed by the threat of global chaos. Wisdom utilizes complexity and ambiguity as instruments of revelation of the awesome mystery of Divine will in creation. It serves to create in persons the attitudes of openness, trust and hope in the beneficence of order of Creation.

Wisdom calls us to live simple lives, and exercise moderation with a view to human limits and the limits of our common global resources. Life must give due praise and glory to the gifts of the natural world which we have received and in which we must continue to trust and nurture. Outward education in the socio-economic dimensions of responsible global stewardship must be accompanied by education in metaphor and parables which stretch the imagination and thereby allow us to maintain relationship with a pluralism of perspectives and concerns. For the Church to effectively address the global situation, wisdom's quality of being at once personal and universal is vital. It is the key to our hope of reconciliation of the whole of Creation. Wisdom's metaphorical consciousness frees the energies of our imaginations to reach out and combat the disorder of the world as well as the disorder of our souls.

Wisdom is a matter of right attitude. Like the blacksmith on his journey, wisdom seekers can be cheerful

because we know who we are, where we have come from, and where we are most immediately going on wisdom's path. Although the future is unknown, we are not afraid, because wisdom walks with us today much as she did with the disciples on the Emmaus Road:

At first she walks in disguise with him, brings fear and trembling upon him and tests him by her discipline until she can trust him, and tempts him with her statutes. Then she comes to him again by a straight path, and gladdens him and reveals to him her secrets.

Sirach 4:17-18

Through the parable-incarnation of Jesus Christ she continues to pray to the Lord of heaven and earth in humility (Matthew 11:25-30); to invite persons to come to her as the source of all true knowledge (Matthew 11:28 ff.); to have all authority as the mediator between heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18-20); to commission persons to teach the world what it means to say, "I am gentle and lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:29) and to promise the eternal presence of God in the destiny of humankind.<sup>57</sup>

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R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, Pre-Existence, Wisdom and the Son of Man (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 68.

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## APPENDIX

## INDEX OF PARABLES

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